



THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO  
**M A T T H E W**



**PART 7**

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## Lesson 56 (2-16-25)

### The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)

That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat beside the sea. <sup>2</sup>And great crowds gathered about him, so that he got into a boat and sat down. And the whole crowd stood on the beach. <sup>3</sup>And he told them many things in parables, saying: “A sower went out to sow. <sup>4</sup>And as he sowed, some seeds fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured them. <sup>5</sup>Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up, since they had no depth of soil, <sup>6</sup>but when the sun rose they were scorched. And since they had no root, they withered away. <sup>7</sup>Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. <sup>8</sup>Other seeds fell on good soil and produced grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. <sup>9</sup>He who has ears, let him hear.” ...

<sup>18</sup>“Hear then the parable of the sower: <sup>19</sup>When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and does not understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what has been sown in his heart. This is what was sown along the path. <sup>20</sup>As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, <sup>21</sup>yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away. <sup>22</sup>As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful. <sup>23</sup>As for what was sown on good soil, this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

- Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23 ESV

### Summary

The word **parables** can refer to a wide variety of figurative speech. Although many interpreters insist that Jesus’s parables were simple metaphors that teach only one main truth, Jesus’s interpretation of his own parables may suggest that many of them were allegories that carried multiple points of symbolism, teaching several related truths. The four types of soil represent types of people and their differing responses to Jesus. The first three types represent those who reject Jesus outright (7:26–27) and those who falsely claim to be his disciples (7:15–23; 10:35–39). These are all **unfruitful**. Only the last type **does produce fruit**. Since producing the fruit of good deeds is an essential expression of discipleship (3:8, 10; 7:16–20; 12:33; 21:18–19, 33–41), only the last type is a true disciple. A harvest of ten to twenty times **what was sown** was considered a bumper crop, given the primitive agricultural technology of the period. The amazing harvest described by Jesus’s parable (**a hundred ... sixty ... thirty**) shows that true disciples produce fruit in a miraculous quantity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles L. Quarles, “Matthew,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1523.

## Discussion Questions

What is a parable? Why do you think Jesus chose to speak in parables (13:3, 10-15)?

What four types of soil does Jesus mention? What characterizes each? What happens to the seed in each kind of soil?

What does Jesus' explanation of the parable (vv. 18-23) reveal about the seed? About the various soils? The fruit? The farmer?

How would you sum up the parable of the Sower in one or two sentences? How might the parable of the Sower help us avoid being manipulative in our preaching, teaching, and evangelizing?

What are some signs that the cares and riches of the world are choking out saving faith as the Bible describes it?

How is persevering faith different from works-righteousness?

What would you say to someone whose only evidence of salvation was a momentary decision?

How can we encourage others who might feel like they are in a season of "rocky" or "thorny" soil?

How does this parable challenge us to evaluate our priorities and the fruitfulness of our faith?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *Douglas Sean O'Donnell, Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 363–371.*]

In Jesus' parables, he used ordinary, everyday, earthly things like lamps, doors, fig trees, vines, wheat, sheep, goats, pearls, and even seeds and soil to explain that every common bush was "afire with God." To him common characters—a prodigal son, an unjust judge, a foolish builder, a bridegroom, a watchman, a thief that comes in the night—could be used to explain the mystery of the kingdom of heaven. And yet that mystery, as we saw in the last sermon, was revealed to some and concealed from others. Some people—the crowds in Jesus' day and the crowds in our today—don't see Jesus for who he is. So instead of taking off their shoes, as Moses did before the burning presence of God, they just sit around and "pluck blackberries." Seeing they do not see. In this chapter, with the Parable of the Sower before us, we will stand with ears open and eyes focused to listen as Jesus brings Heaven down to earth so we might be brought to God.

### **The Sower, the Seeds, and the Soils**

When I sat down to study this passage, I first made a simple chart with two columns. In the left column I listed the main details in the parable as given in verses 3–9. I listed *the sower*, *the seeds*, and the *four soils*. Then, in the right column, looking at verses 18–23, I listed how Jesus interpreted these various details.

In doing this I first discovered that the "sower" mentioned in verse 3 is not identified. Having noticed this omission, and believing there was some purpose for it, I concluded the "sower" must symbolize one or all of the following. It could be that the "sower" refers to God, for at times this language is used of him in the Old Testament. Or it could be that the "sower" refers to Jesus, for when Jesus explains the Parable of the Weeds he says in 13:37, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man." Or it could be that the "sower" represents any preacher, parent, or Sunday school teacher—that is, anyone and everyone who sows the word. Our Lord's lack of interpretation regarding the "sower," which I think is intentional, allows for an expanded application. The "sower" could include or does include God, his Son, and any and all gospel workers.

As I worked my way down this chart, I noticed next that the "seeds" (cf. Isaiah 55:10, 11) mentioned in this parable symbolized "the word" (six times) and more specifically "the word of the kingdom" (v. 19). This is just Jesus' way of saying "the gospel"—the good news to the nations of the establishment of Jesus' sovereign rule by means of his death and resurrection. The "seed" is the gospel.

So we have the "sower" and the "seeds." Next we come to the "soils." This parable is often called the Parable of the Sower and the Seeds or the Parable of the Sower. This title obviously comes from Jesus himself in verse 18. However, verse 18 really just sets the stage for what follows. While the sower and the seeds are mentioned first, it is the four different *soils* and their receptivity or lack thereof that dominates the rest of the parable. And this is why some have relabeled this text the Parable of the Soils (although I think the title the Parable of the Surfaces might be even better).

Obviously there are four soils, or four types of surfaces, and three are bad and one is good. Because of that three-to-one division, many people have taught this parable pessimistically, dividing it into four parts, spending equal time on each soil (so three-fourths negative, one-fourth positive). However, because I'm convinced that the last soil in our text is the pinnacle of the parable—the ultimate reason for the parable, the point of the parable—I want to give the first three soils half our time, so we can give the last soil the other half of the chapter as well.

Long, long ago in a land far, far away there was another Christian preacher who thought the way I thought, or perhaps I'm thinking the way he thought. Anyway, in the fifth century Cyril of Alexandria spoke of this parable in this way: "Christ has recounted the three ways of disaster, and ... the three grades of glory." (I don't know if the three grades of glory is exactly right, but at the very least you see the balance.) Soils one through three represent the "three ways of disaster," and soil four (getting equal emphasis) represents "the three grades of glory."

### **Three Ways of \_\_\_\_\_**

With that division in mind, we'll start where Jesus does, with *the three ways of disaster* (vv. 19–22). Before we look at the three ways of disaster represented by these three sorry soils, I want us to grasp that there are two different perspectives to take in interpreting Jesus' interpretation, both of which are necessary. One perspective is to view *the three ways of disaster* from an internal perspective, from the soils' point of view, so to speak. That is, identifying the problem in the soil's hardness, shallowness, and self-indulgence, what James Montgomery Boice called the hard heart, the shallow heart, and the strangled heart. Another perspective is to view *the three ways of disaster* from an external perspective, identifying the problem from the outside—in terms of Satan (the birds of v. 4), persecutions, trials, and temptations.

With that in mind, in looking then at the first soil, the soil "along the path" (v. 4), if we are looking from both perspectives, we should see that both demonic warfare and human hardheartedness are the reasons why the seed is swiftly gobbled up. On the one hand, Satan is to blame, for like a hungry bird he "comes and snatches away what has been sown" (v. 19). On the other hand, the only reason Satan can consume such seed is because the seed never went below the surface; it stayed atop the hard ground.

Now, who in the Gospel of Matthew represents this soil? Of course, we think of the Pharisees. They certainly fit nicely into this soil sample. At first they are curious about Jesus. Along with the crowd, at the beginning they think, "Can this be the Christ? Let's give him a good look." But it doesn't take long for their hearts to harden. When they hear Jesus say that he has the authority to forgive sins, their hearts begin to tighten; and when they see him welcome sinners to table fellowship, their hearts start to slowly freeze; and finally, once he breaks their sacred laws by healing a man on the Sabbath, their small, cold hearts become calcified, as hard as a floor. And the seed still sitting there right atop their hard hearts is an easy swallow for Satan.

However, the Pharisees are not alone in this category. Many others fit in as well, even those people of Jesus' own hometown: "And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, and coming to his hometown [Nazareth] he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, 'Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works?' " (vv. 53, 54). Here the seed of the gospel is planted, but listen to the hardness of heart, watch the arteries start to clog.

Wait a minute, they say. "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this [ordinary and familiar] man get all these things [this power and wisdom]?" (vv. 55, 56) Their mind-set was, "Jesus sure acts like the Messiah, and he sure speaks like the Messiah, but he can't possibly be the Messiah because he's one of us. He is a poor boy from the backstreets of the Bronx. 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' " (John 1:46).

Then look at verse 57. Here that devilish bird grabs the seed, gives it one shake, and down it goes. "And they took offense at him" (v. 57). What's going on here? They go from awe to offense and "unbelief" (v. 58). "He came to his own [his own town], and his own [towns]people did not receive him" (John 1:11). So I want you to see in 12:46–50, which comes right before the seven parables, and here in 13:53–58, which comes right after them, that we find this unpleasant inclusio: Jesus is rejected by house and home, by his own household (his mother and brothers) and also by his own hometown (his fellow townspeople).

That's the first soil—human hard-heartedness and satanic swooping. The second soil is the "rocky ground." "This is the one," as Jesus explains in verses 20, 21, "who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away." Here we have represented those people whose inward shallowness (they are not hard but shallow) is exposed the moment outward trouble arises. They reject the gospel due to *rootlessness*: "he has no root in himself" (v. 21). When tribulations and persecutions—various sufferings of sorts—arise like the scorching sun (that's the image Jesus gives in v. 6), this shallow "faith" sadly withers away. The same person who "immediately" received the gospel with joy also "immediately ... falls away" (v. 21).

Years ago I remember hearing a story about Martyn Lloyd-Jones, one of the great preachers of the last century. One day after Lloyd-Jones preached a powerful sermon, an unbeliever came up to him and said, "Dr. Lloyd-Jones, I must tell you that if you would have given an altar call at the end of your message I certainly would have come forward. I would have believed." Lloyd-Jones replied, "If you don't want Jesus five minutes after the service is over, then I assure you that you didn't truly want him at any point during my sermon." Now perhaps that is stronger than you would put it. But the point is a good one.

The true test of discipleship is not whether or not one received the gospel with joy at some datable moment in history. The true test of discipleship is whether or not one picks up his cross and follows Jesus, not for one day or two weeks or three months or four years, but until Jesus



calls him home. The true Christian is not like a cut flower that a husband gives to his wife, a flower quite beautiful and alive for a week, but quite repulsive and dead after the unrelenting sun has beaten down upon it for a month.

Have you ever known someone who has fallen away from the faith? I would imagine most of us have. And why in America, where there is so little persecution, is this true? Right now as you read this chapter, Christians in Sudan, China, and Iran are meeting secretly in homes, hotel rooms, and backrooms of businesses, and other Christians throughout the world are being beaten, tortured, and killed because they will not renounce Jesus Christ. As Blomberg notes, “In the twentieth century there were more martyrs for the Christian faith worldwide than in all nineteen previous centuries of church history combined.” So why in America, where there is so little persecution, do so many people fall away from the faith?

Part of the reason comes with the next bad surface—the love of this world (and especially the love of money). However, another part of the blame must be laid on those sloppy, sappy sowers—Christian evangelists who preach a half-seeded gospel, evangelists who never tell their disciples what Jesus repeatedly has been telling us in Matthew—that if you follow him, suffering will follow you. Today’s evangelist says, “I need a thousand raised hands as a sign of success and God’s blessing,” but Jesus says, “Just give me twelve men who are willing to suffer and endure until the end, and I’ll change the world.” Perseverance through persecutions and triumphing through trials is what is necessary, through the power of God’s might. Endurance is part of the basics of Christianity: “But the one who endures to the end will be saved” (10:22; 24:13).

So the first bad surface is “the path” (the person who cannot hold on to the gospel because he is inwardly hard and thus outwardly easy prey). The second bad surface is the “rocky ground” (the person who is so inwardly shallow that he outwardly cannot withstand the testing of his faith). The third bad surface is the thorn-infested soil. Concerning this soil Jesus says, “As for what was sown among thorns, this is the one who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and it proves unfruitful” (v. 22).

The person described is inwardly self-indulgent and thus outwardly choked by worldly concerns. Put differently, this person cares too little about his soul because he cares too much about the world. For him the good seed never grows, but the thorns, which represent his worldly attachments, certainly do. Two thorns in particular grow, and they grow from the same root system. One thorn is “the cares of the world,” and the other is “the deceitfulness of riches.” Both have at their root the love of money. Both have to do with not trusting God always and ultimately. You cannot serve both God and money. If you trust and treasure money above all, when you don’t have enough of it your heart will be flooded with all sorts of anxieties. But if you trust and treasure money above all and you have a lot of it, then your problems are solved, right? Wrong! Then you have a bigger problem: you won’t see your need for God and his grace, provision, and salvation.

I can count on my fingers and toes, with ten fingers and ten toes left, how many money-lovers live like the lilies—that is, in carefree joy, trusting in their heavenly Father for everything! Money, money, money, money ... MONEY. It can choke your spiritual life. At the end of the last century, historian Martin Marty called evangelicals “the most worldly people in America.” What a condemnation! But he’s right. Listen to this statistic. Each Sunday evangelicals around American sing songs like “I Surrender All,” but 80 percent of us give on average only between 2 and 3 percent of our income, and 20 percent don’t give anything at all.

Let’s do the math. The average household income (usually two incomes) in the city where I live is \$120,000 a year. Two to 3 percent is somewhere around \$3,000 out of pocket given to others. These are people who claim to be Christians. Where on earth is the rest of the money going? I’ll tell you where it’s going—it’s lining their (your?) coffins. You can’t take it with you to Heaven, but you sure will take it with you to Hell. Don’t think you can trust money and get into Heaven. Don’t think you can treasure earthly treasures and still inherit the eternal pleasures of God. “Friendship with the world is enmity with God” (James 4:4). If money is your best friend, God is not.

I know riches are not the problem. The heart is the problem. I know a rich man can get into the kingdom of heaven, but I also know how hard it is. Watch out for riches; they can be deceitful. They will love you one day and leave you the next. No, they will love you one day and choke you the next. Money, money, money, money ... MONEY. You wouldn’t sell Jesus for thirty silver coins, would you? Or would you?

### **Three Grades of \_\_\_\_\_**

Satan. Suffering. Stuff. The hard heart. The shallow heart. The strangled heart. There are three ways of disaster. But (praise be to God!) there are also three grades of glory. Take off your shoes. Finally we’ve come to verse 23. Let’s feel the holy heat of this verse. “As for what was sown on good soil,” our Lord explains, “this is the one who hears the word and understands it. He indeed bears fruit and yields, in one case a hundredfold, in another sixty, and in another thirty.”

It is true, as Jesus said about the wide road to destruction (7:13), that the majority of people who have indeed heard the gospel have rejected it, due in part, as this parable tells us, to human weakness and wickedness. Yet it is interesting that here Jesus makes no strong statement of judgment upon these three groups of apostates and unbelievers; instead he refers only to the great fruitfulness of the number who will be saved. Here Jesus ignores judgment (which he won’t do at the end of the other parables) and focuses instead on this “superabundant harvest.”

I say “superabundant” because the average harvest at that time in history in that barren, desert region of the world (Palestine is no Nebraska) was probably “no more than seven or eight times the amount of seed sown.” So, to produce tenfold the amount of seed was considered a good harvest, twentyfold an exceptional harvest, and a thirtyfold or sixtyfold or (my goodness) a

hundredfold, well, such a harvest was almost unthinkable. Here we have this unthinkable harvest, which would have stunned the original audience. As Jesus spoke from the boat and his voice carried up the hillside (vv. 1, 2), these words would have hit them like an unexpected tsunami. So in using this shocking language of thirtyfold, sixtyfold, and a hundredfold, Jesus is ending on a very positive note. And he is not saying, “All Christians will bear fruit, some a little and some a lot.” Rather he is saying, “All Christians will bear fruit, some a lot, some a lot more, and some a whole lot more.”

If we could return to my chart and visualize the four soils in the left column and their interpretation in the right, what I found to be most remarkable was that for each soil or type of response Jesus essentially begins with the words “the one who hears the word” (vv. 20, 22, 23), or as it is in verse 19, “When anyone hears the word ...” The difference between the soils is not hearing. They all hear. All four soils hear the word and to some extent or for some period of time accept it. Even the first soil is for a time on “the path” (v. 4)—i.e., the seed is “sown in his heart” (v. 19). The one difference between the three bad soils and the one good soil is that the latter “bears fruit” (v. 23; cf. v. 8).

There are vital differences between the first three bad surfaces and the last good soil, between the three bad hearers and the good hearer. The good hearer, who is neither hard nor shallow nor self-indulgent, welcomes the word *immediately* so it cannot be snatched away by Satan, welcomes it *deeply* so it is not withered by persecution, and welcomes it *exclusively* so other concerns do not strangle it. Then he bears fruit! He is not just a “hearer of the word” but a “doer” of the word (James 1:23). He bears fruit, a harvest of “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23), as well as a harvest of humility, prayerfulness, heavenly-mindedness. He lives a life of consistent obedience to the commands of Christ, a steadfast commitment to the will of God in Heaven on earth.

## Conclusion

In 3:8, 10 John the Baptist said, “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance.... Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” Our Lord Jesus, in John 15:5–8, adds: I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that *bears much fruit*.... If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned.... By this my Father is glorified, that you *bear much fruit* and so *prove* to be my disciples.

What a statement! You prove yourself to be a disciple of Jesus if you [do what? Say you are, work miracles, speak like an angel? No, if you bear much fruit—thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold. The true work of Christ in the believer is as obvious as red delicious apples on an apple tree! Don’t tell me you are a Christian if there is no fruit (cf. 7:16–21; 12:33; 21:43). As another great poet once wrote:

Blessed is the man  
    who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
nor stands in the way of sinners,  
    nor sits in the seat of scoffers [he doesn't let such outside influences get  
    to his heart, to harden it or strangle it];  
but his delight is in the law of the LORD,  
    and on his law he meditates day and night.  
    [He takes the seed of God's Word immediately and deeply and  
    exclusively. And so what happens?]

He is like a tree  
    planted by streams of water  
that yields its fruit in its season. (Psalm 1:1–3a)

Are you abiding in Christ? If so, there will be fruit one season after another.



## Lesson 57 (3-2-25)

### The Wheat and the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)

<sup>24</sup> He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, <sup>25</sup> but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. <sup>26</sup> So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. <sup>27</sup> And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ <sup>28</sup> He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ <sup>29</sup> But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. <sup>30</sup> Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, “Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.” ’ ’ ...

<sup>36</sup> Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples came to him, saying, “Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field.” <sup>37</sup> He answered, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. <sup>38</sup> The field is the world, and the good seed is the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, <sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. <sup>40</sup> Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. <sup>41</sup> The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, <sup>42</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. <sup>43</sup> Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

- Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43 ESV

### Summary

With further parables drawing on various common experiences, Jesus describes the arrival and activity of the kingdom of heaven (vv. 24–52). In verses 24–30, a weedy rye grass with poisonous seeds looks like wheat in its early stages of growth, but it can be distinguished easily at harvest time. Attempting to uproot the weeds before harvest would endanger the wheat because the roots of the weeds are so closely intertwined with those of the wheat. After Jesus leaves the crowd, the disciples request clarification about the parable of the weeds. The parable of the weeds describes the activity of the kingdom in the world. Jesus is the sower of good seed, the one who initially proclaimed the message of the kingdom and who continues to proclaim it to the world through his followers. The good seed are Jesus’ disciples; the weeds are unbelievers. The harvest refers to the judgment that will accompany the coming of the Son of Man to consummate the establishment of the kingdom (24:3). The “blazing furnace” and the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” are Jesus’ typical expressions of eternal judgment (cf. 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> David Gundersen, “Psalms,” in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1312–1313.

## Discussion Questions

Another type of “seed” is mentioned in 13:24. What is this other seed? Who sowed it?

What was the farmer doing in 13:25–30 while the weeds were sown?

What did the farmer tell his servants to do about the weeds?

What will happen to the weeds at harvest time?

In 13:36 Jesus left the crowd, entered a house, and was asked by His disciples to explain the parable of the weeds. Who is the sower of the good seed?

What is the good seed? What is the field?

Who sows the bad seed?

Who will be the harvesters and when will the harvest come?

What will happen to those things that cause sin and all who do evil? What will happen to the righteous?

What does this parable teach us about the presence of evil in the world and how God deals with it?

Why is it sometimes difficult to tell the difference between those who believe in Christ and those who do not (see Acts 26:20; Titus 1:16)?

What does this passage teach us about church purity? Divine patience? Human accountability?

Was there anything from last week’s sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *Daniel M. Doriani, Matthew 1 & 2*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 1, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 568–578.]

How do we stomach the gap between our dreams and daily life? The gap between what the leader promises and what he delivers? The gap between our goals and our achievements? The gap between our ideals and our behavior? Jesus' second parable of the kingdom (13:24–30) lets us address these questions. In his first parable (13:3–8), Jesus compared the kingdom of God to a field that bears a highly variable crop, some of it bitterly disappointing, some of it wonderfully pleasing.

The parable of the wheat and the weeds leads us again to consider disappointment, the evils of this world. For a moment, the parable sounds like bad news because it asks us to wait, to tolerate evil. Later, we learn that the bad news will not last. Still, it helps us to know that we must anticipate seasons of trouble before we see a happy resolution. The parable of the sower (13:1–23) is good news. It says the kingdom of God will advance even though hearts are hard. Some people place the word of God into competition with the cares of this world, yet it advances. Many hearers show superficial interest in it; still it advances. The sons and daughters of God grow only by fits and starts, so they bear little fruit. Still the kingdom advances.

The parable of the wheat and the weeds adds a new thought. While the righteous and the wicked grow together, they can be indistinguishable for a time. It may be impossible to tell believers from unbelievers, but God knows his people. Eventually, he will separate the righteous and the wicked. He will judge and remove the wicked, but will reward the righteous and bring them into his presence.

Both the parable of the sower and the parable of wheat and weeds contain good and bad news. Both declare that the kingdom has arrived and will grow until the harvest. Yet both hint that the kingdom does not take the form that the people of God imagined. Above all, Jesus says the word of the kingdom arrives quietly, like a seed. It does not come with force, like an army. It does not come as a club or a hammer, it comes like a seed. It comes in words. Even as a word, it comes with a story, not a command.

The parable of the sower describes the way the kingdom comes—softly. It leaves important matters open-ended: How does Jesus evaluate the nation's current condition? Its hopes for the future? But the parable also explains the ways of God. God spoke to Israel and he spoke to the church. In fact, God is always speaking, always sowing his good seed, his truth. Men and women, angels and animals, stars, planets, and plants all hear his word and respond to it (Ps. 104:7, 33). Some are quick to obey, some obey fitfully, and some can hardly hear what Jesus says.

The parable of the sower is about the ways of the kingdom and about the ways of King Jesus. Jesus is the sower, and he sows his seed whenever anyone rightly declares his word. Indeed, he



sows his seed every week in every faithful church. Those who seek Jesus will hear his word and understand it. But if they do not listen for Jesus, his words sound garbled. His parables reveal truth to some, but veil it from others.

The parables of Matthew 13 both give hope and explain disappointment. They say the kingdom is here, in part, without its full might or glory. This creates dissonance for believers. If we know Jesus is Savior and Lord, why doesn't everyone believe in him? If the kingdom is here, why is there so much evil in the world? Why does Christ's cause struggle as much as it does? Why do churches, missions, and schools flounder? Jesus urges patience; we must "expect continued hostility" from those who reject him. But can we tolerate the dissonance—the kingdom is already here, but not yet in its fullness?

...The kingdom often looks small and frail, but it will bear an abundant harvest. This is not the easiest thing to understand. Even the prophet John the Baptist stumbled over it. He believed Jesus was God's Anointed One. He knew Jesus healed the sick, but he expected more power, a more obvious defeat of the enemy. John had previously said Jesus is the mighty one, the worthy one, the judge, and the Lamb of God (Matt. 3:11–14; Luke 3:17; John 1:29). But when Jesus did not come swiftly with power and judgment, John doubted. We can doubt too, when we want to see power and do not. To prepare us for these disappointments, Jesus tells us that his work will start small but will finally bear an abundant harvest. So let us tolerate the dissonance and not lose heart over small beginnings.

We may pause to harvest the implications of these principles. First then, let us admit that we naturally desire rapid achievement. If an entrepreneur has a business plan and knows what resources he needs, he wants to start his venture now and charge through the early stages. If a composer has planned the themes and variations for her piece, she wants the notes to flow to the page as they did for Mozart. We want rapid growth in relationships too. If a woman knows where a relationship ought to go, she wants it to grow now. We become impatient when projects take too long. Yet we need the time involved in processes. If we never meet an unexpected obstacle, if we never face a problem or a delay, how can we grow? We grow by overcoming obstacles. God cares about the success of our work, but he wants us to grow, not just to achieve.

Second, we must accept the gradual, incremental growth of God's work. A friend described a conversation that illustrates the point. At a block party, a woman and a man who lived a block apart met for the first time. After a while, she asked about his occupation. "I am a pastor," he replied. After a long, rather awkward silence, the woman replied, "I don't attend church very often, but I find myself thinking about religion more and more." The pastor wisely replied, "That sounds like a good start."

### **THE WHEAT AND WEEDS**

Shortly after he told the parable of the sower, Jesus put another parable before "them," that is, the larger crowd. The topic, once again, is the nature of the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom,

Jesus says, can be compared to a farmer who sowed good seed—the right seed for his purpose. He had servants, so we assume he sowed some of the seed and his servants joined the work. Farmer and servants labored well, but while they slept an enemy secretly came and sowed weeds throughout the field and left (13:24–25). Rival farmers sometimes feuded and did such things. The foe was diabolical. Jesus mentions a particular weed, called tares or darnels today. Since the darnel looks rather like wheat in the early stages, the perfidy initially went undetected. But as the grain sprouted and grew, so did the weeds. The servants saw this and reported it to their master: “The owner’s servants came to him and said, ‘Sir, didn’t you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?’ ” (13:27). Since the master surely sowed good seed, the profusion of weeds confuses them. Where did they come from (13:26–27)?

The master sees the hand of his enemy behind the profusion of weeds. The servants offer to root out the weeds, but the master knows there are too many. The roots are intertwined, so that any effort to uproot the weeds will destroy the wheat (13:28–29). So, for now, everyone must let the wheat and the weeds grow up together: “Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn” (13:30). When the harvest comes, the master will give a new command. Then the servants will gather the weeds first, bind them into bundles and burn them. But as for the wheat, the servants will gather it into the master’s barn (13:30).

The parable obviously reiterates the principle, from Matthew 13:3–8, that the kingdom has come. It also adds a new thought: the heirs of the kingdom must still live beside the heirs of this world. Both kingdoms exist, side by side, until time ends. Then Jesus will judge all flesh and usher in eternity.

### **THE MEANING OF THE STORY**

Jesus moved on, but the disciples did not understand, so they “came to him and said, ‘Explain to us the parable of the weeds in the field’ ” (13:36). Jesus says the elements in the story represent characters in real life. The story is an allegory and it has three phases. First, the farmer sows good seed, seed that will grow. Second, an enemy sows weeds in the field where the seed grows. The weeds threaten the crop. Yet, third, the wheat survives. In time the harvest comes; then the farmer destroys the evil weeds and gathers the wheat to himself. He saves the wheat, which is good news, for the wheat represents the children of God.

### ***The Son of Man* \_\_\_\_\_**

Jesus said, “The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man” (13:37). That is, Jesus is the sower. He sows continually, not just once. He sows good seed—the gospel. The message comes as a story, not an ultimatum, for the kingdom does not come by force, or like an army.

There was a time when Christian leaders tried to compel others to convert. Charlemagne brought the Christian faith as he conquered large parts of Europe. Sometimes he had vanquished armies stand before him by a river. He then offered them a choice. Would they like to receive the water of baptism or the waters of drowning? Centuries later, crusaders besieged Jerusalem and sought (among other goals) to re-Christianize it by force. This was not a high point of Christendom. When we try to advance the gospel by force, there are no true conversions. The Lord certainly can use force, but most of the time, he persuades gently. While the Bible can insist on its authority, it ordinarily operates by “a non-violent appeal” to the imagination. We win people by persuasion, not force. (In this sense, the saying “no one ever wins an argument” is true.)

Secular people are offended when aggressive Christians try to force their agenda on others. They are outraged at Christians who “think they know the truth.” If knowing the truth is the charge, then we plead guilty, and marshal all evidence for our claim. But we don’t force the truth on others, we don’t distort their views to gain an advantage. Indeed, in an academic or intellectual argument, one way we love our neighbor as ourselves is by stating their position in terms they would approve. In these ways, we persuade with strong but kind and honest words and by acts of love. The kingdom comes gently, like a seed, not with force like a club or a hammer. A hammer is a legitimate tool and every man ought to have one. But some men want to use hammers all the time, even to drive screws. The Lord owns a hammer, but it is not his favorite instrument.

### ***The Field Is the \_\_\_\_\_***

Jesus also explains that “the field is the world” (13:38). He scatters his good seed, his truth, throughout the inhabited earth. Earlier, Jesus hinted that the good seed is “the word of the kingdom” (13:19 ESV). Now he says “the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom” whereas “the weeds are the sons of the evil one” (13:38b). So Jesus scatters *us* through the world. In one sense, we *take* his truth with us, wherever we go. In another sense, we *are* his truth. Whenever our lives show the sweet strength of Jesus, we *are* his seed.

We see this in a Christian man who loves to work with wood. He knows two fatherless boys in his neighborhood. They are a little wild, the kind of boys who always seem to be throwing rocks at dogs or windows, but he invites them into his shop. He teaches them to work and to heed a man’s voice of authority. We see it when a woman notices that her friend is upset. She comes and sits beside her, touching her arm. She whispers just one sentence, “Jesus loves you still.” That is good seed, bringing God’s love and truth into this world.

### ***The Growth of the \_\_\_\_\_***

The kingdom grows when the word is sown. It grows, too, whenever a Christian takes his or her faith to work. Consider J. R. R. Tolkien, the professor and novelist who wrote the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy decades ago. His work is not explicitly Christian. It never even mentions God, but Tolkien’s faith informed every page. The story has noble characters who risk everything in an

epic battle between good and evil. Perhaps it was easier to write of an epic struggle between good and evil in the 1940s, while a world war raged. Nonetheless we give thanks for the books and the subsequent films, for their positive portrayals of Christian virtues such as loyalty, courage, hope, and commitment to duty.

### ***The Growth of \_\_\_\_\_***

The third film in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy swept the 2004 Academy Awards, including best film. In 2005, *Million Dollar Baby* was named best picture. It is a strong film, superbly written and acted, and one can only admire the loyal friendships at the movie's core. But the film also has problems. For example, it features a priest who curses, and, among other things, tells a tormented man not to come back to church. More importantly, the story line promotes euthanasia as a solution to the problems caused by a devastating injury. *Million Dollar Baby* is not an evil film, but there are evils in it, and they illustrate Jesus' point that evil grows right alongside the good, so we can hardly discern what is good and what is bad. It is the same with secular schools, which are wonderful in some ways and disturbing in others. Infiltration is the plan. Satan sows evil beside the good in schools, governments, entertainments, and even churches.

Satan's indirect approach is sensible since frontal assault rarely defeats a superior force and God is the superior force. Therefore Satan relies on treachery and confusion. He sneaks in and sows weeds among the good seed. Jesus says "the weeds are the sons of the evil one" (13:38). Satan scatters them through the earth to spoil God's project of reclaiming his world.

Thus the parable explains a mystery. It explains, one more time, the malice of Jewish leaders who blaspheme Jesus and plot to destroy him. We marvel at such evil. Perhaps it is because we live in a civilized land, among civilized people. We are polite, so that even if someone dislikes us, it may not be clear. Politeness masks darkness. Civility masks the principle that Jesus needs his disciples to hear, even now: there is evil in this world. Yes, much evil is accidental and much is caused by small vices and simple selfishness. But there are forces that wish to destroy God and his people. They will trouble the world until the end. Nonetheless, Jesus says, evil endures for a season, not forever. At the end of history the weeds will be uprooted and burned and the righteous will shine, with nary a cloud to block the light...

### **THE EXPLANATION AND THE RESOLUTION**

Hear again, therefore, who the characters in the story represent: He answered, "The one who sowed the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one, and the enemy who sows them is the devil. The harvest is the end of the age, and the harvesters are angels.

"As the weeds are pulled up and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of the age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping

and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.” (Matt. 13:37–43)

Jesus is the sower. He keeps scattering his truth and his people through the world. The enemy, sowing bad seed, is the devil. He wants to deceive the world by hiding the light of Christ. The harvest is the end of the age, the end of time. “The harvesters are angels” whom God sends to collect his harvest (13:39). They begin their work by gathering, binding, and burning the weeds (13:40, 42). They remove “everything that causes sin and all who do evil”—every cause of stumbling, every cause of temptation, from the earth (13:41). They will stop lawless deeds, remove all evil men, and “throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (13:42).

## **Conclusion**

After the eradication of evil, “the righteous will shine like the sun” (13:43). We are the light of the world, and one day nothing will stop that light from shining. The temptations and internal flaws that lead us to sin will melt away when we see God and become like him (1 John 3:2, 5).

Until then, Jesus urges patience. His kingdom has come, but evil remains. We do not shine, so we lean on Christ. The causes of evil have not been fully uprooted. Therefore, we turn to the Lord for strength. We seek his grace, and find it, when we refuse to succumb to the evils that grow alongside us. While we wait, we trust God and tolerate the dissonances of life. We know the Lord has his reasons for delaying the day of judgment. His gospel is still spreading; his kingdom and his people are still maturing. But Jesus will return and that transforms our perspective on the darkness of life.

The story is often told of certain POWs in World War II who managed to construct a radio from bits and scraps and hide it in their bunk. The radio told them that the war was over four days before messengers and liberators reached their camp. For four days they knew victory would surely arrive. During those four days, no aspect of their outward circumstances changed. But what joy they shared! How much more should we rejoice in the victory of Christ and take strength from it, even if the works of evil linger.

## Lesson 58 (3-9-25)

### Two Parables About Influence (Matthew 13:31-33)

<sup>31</sup> He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field. <sup>32</sup> It is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is larger than all the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

<sup>33</sup> He told them another parable. “The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”

- Matthew 13:31-33 ESV

### Summary

The next two parables in Ch. 13 stress the inevitable growth of the kingdom of heaven, despite the resistance it faces. The parable of the mustard seed contrasts the seemingly insignificant inception of the kingdom of heaven, in the world and in a person’s life, with its momentous results.<sup>1</sup>

### Discussion Questions

What is the connection between the kingdom and the size of the mustard seed and how it grows (13:31–32)?

In what way is the kingdom like yeast (13:33)? What can we learn from this parable?

How do these parables challenge or encourage common expectations about how God works in the world?

What encouragement might come to persecuted believers from the parables of the Mustard Seed and Yeast?

How have you seen small beginnings lead to something significant in your own life or faith journey?

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Mt 13:31–33.

In what ways can you allow God's kingdom to grow or transform you, like leaven in dough?

How does the imagery in these parables contrast with how the world often measures success or significance?

What role do patience and trust play in our participation in God's kingdom work?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *John F. MacArthur Jr., Matthew, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 368–375.*]

After hearing the parables of the sower and of the wheat and tares, the disciples no doubt wondered how Christ's kingdom could survive if so many people rejected Him and were then allowed to stay on earth with contaminating influence. How could God's people survive, much less thrive, in the midst of such unfavorable circumstances? Would not the great power of Satan and his evil forces, both demonic and human, utterly overwhelm and stifle the few (cf. 7:13–14) of God's saints on earth?

Long before Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion it was evident that the Jewish leaders rejected His claims of messiahship. It was also obvious that the multitudes who praised and followed Him did not understand His true nature or mission and were only superficially attracted to Him. His true disciples were a handful against the whole nation of Israel, not to mention the vast and ungodly Roman empire and the regions beyond. In response to that unspoken concern, Jesus used these two parables to emphasize that small things can have far-reaching effects...In an immeasurably more dramatic and important way, God would demonstrate through the church how a handful of believers, totally weak and inept in themselves, would in His power turn the world upside down. The kingdom of heaven would grow and prosper in spite of Satan's opposition and would ultimately permeate and influence the whole world in Jesus' name.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE MUSTARD SEED (13:31–32)**

In this **parable** Jesus again uses the figure of planting and compares **the kingdom of heaven to a mustard seed** and its growth into a full-grown plant. **Mustard** has long been a widely-used herb throughout much of the world, and in modern times it has found additional commercial value in the manufacture of film. Amazingly, years ago it was discovered that cows whose feed

was supplemented with mustard seed developed bones that had a superior quality for use in making the silver compounds used in photographic film.

Jesus' referring to the **mustard seed** as being **smaller than all other seeds** has often been cited as proof that Scripture is errant—that Jesus was either fallible and made a mistake or that He accommodated His teaching to the ignorance of His hearers and knowingly distorted the truth. But He was not comparing this seed to all other seeds in existence but only to the seeds of **garden plants** in Palestine. Many seeds, such as those of the wild orchid, are much smaller than the seed of the mustard plant. But of the many plants grown at that time in the gardens and fields of Palestine, the mustard plant has the smallest seeds, just as Jesus said.

When *sperma* (**seed**) is used in the New Testament in reference to plants, it is always used of agricultural plants, those intentionally grown for food. And of those **plants**, the mustard had seeds that were **smaller than all other seeds**. Dr. L. H. Shinnars, director of the herbarium at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and lecturer at the Smithsonian Institution, stated in a conversation that

the mustard seed would indeed have been the smallest of those to have been noticed by the people at the time of Christ. The principal field crops (barley, wheat, lentils, and beans) have much larger seeds, as do other plants which might have been present as weeds and so forth. There are various weeds and wild flowers belonging to the mustard, amaranth, pigweed, or chickweed families with seeds that are as small as or smaller than mustard; but they would not have been known or noticed by the inhabitants. They are wild and they certainly would not have been planted as a crop.... The only modern crop plant in existence with smaller seeds than mustard is tobacco, and this plant of American origin was not grown in the old world until the sixteenth century or later.

This parable is also criticized for supposedly exaggerating the size of the mustard plant, referring to it as **a tree**, in which **the birds of the air come and nest in its branches**. Many varieties of mustard plants are rather small bushes whose **branches** are too flimsy for **birds** to **nest** in. But the mustard plant of Palestine often grows to a height of twelve or fifteen feet. Just as Jesus said, **when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants, and, from a comparative viewpoint, becomes a tree**. At certain times of the year the branches become rigid enough to easily support a bird's nest.

But, even though the omniscient Jesus was speaking literally and accurately in this parable, His purpose was proverbial, not technical or scientific. Because of its tiny size, the mustard seed was commonly used in the ancient Near East to represent things that were extremely small. Ancient Jewish literature contains references to a drop of blood or a blemish on an animal that was the size of a mustard seed. To this day Arabs sometimes speak of faith weighing as little as a mustard seed, in much the same way Jesus did (Matt. 17:20).

If Jesus explained this parable to the disciples, we have no record of it, and in the context of His teaching about the kingdom it would not have been necessary. Its meaning was self-evident. As just mentioned, the idea of a small mustard seed growing into a large plant was proverbial, and



the disciples would have immediately understood Jesus' point: the kingdom of heaven, though now \_\_\_\_\_ and seemingly \_\_\_\_\_, would one day grow into a \_\_\_\_\_ of believers. That is the central lesson of this parable.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, the kingdom was almost imperceptible, both because of its few citizens and because it was spiritual and invisible. It did not come "with signs to be observed," Jesus explained on another occasion; "nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke 17:20–21)...But the kingdom that started very small would one day become very large. Although the Old Testament writers were not aware that the Messiah would come to earth twice or of the intermediate kingdom that would separate those two comings, they knew that ultimately the Lord would "rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth" (Ps. 72:8). The desert nomads would bow before Him, the kings of Tarshish and of the islands would bring Him presents, the kings of Sheba and Seba would offer gifts, all kings would bow down before Him, and all nations would serve Him (vv. 9–11). In the end, "the kingdom of the world [will] become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

Another lesson of the parable of the mustard seed is that the kingdom of heaven will be a \_\_\_\_\_ to the rest of the world. The **tree** that grows from the small **mustard seed** represents the kingdom of heaven, which in the present age corresponds to the church. Some interpreters have held that the **birds of the air** represent demons or other evil forces, as they do in the parable of the sower (Matt. 13:19). But there is no reason to expect a given figure to always represent the same thing, and the idea of evil is alien to the context of this parable. The figure of **birds** making nests normally calls to mind that which is positive and helpful. Nesting carries the idea of protection, safety, refuge, and sanctuary, which the mother bird provides for her young.

In Nebuchadnezzar's dream he beheld "a tree in the midst of the earth, and its height was great. The tree grew large and became strong, and its height reached to the sky, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth. Its foliage was beautiful and its fruit abundant, and in it was food for all. The beasts of the field found shade under it, and the birds of the sky dwelt in its branches, and all living creatures fed themselves from it" (Dan. 4:10–12). In his interpretation of the king's vision Daniel explains that "the tree that you saw ... is you, O king; for you have become great and grown strong, and your majesty has become great and reached to the sky and your dominion to the end of the earth" (vv. 20, 22). Under Nebuchadnezzar the Babylonian empire had brought unparalleled advancement in almost every field of endeavor—agriculture, architecture, education, the arts, literature, economics, and many others. Despite the cost in lives and slave labor, it had brought prosperity to a large part of the known world at that time. In the king's vision, the birds and animals who benefited from the tree's shade and food were the other nations of the world.

In a revelation to Ezekiel, the Lord described Assyria as "a cedar in Lebanon with beautiful branches and forest shade, and very high; and its top was among the clouds. The waters made it grow, the deep made it high.... Therefore its height was loftier than all the trees of the field

and its boughs became many and its branches long because of many waters as it spread them out. All the birds of the heavens nested in its boughs, and under its branches all the beasts of the field gave birth, and all great nations lived under its shade” (Ezek. 31:3–6).

Both Jesus and the disciples were familiar with those accounts, and the parallel to the parable of the mustard seed seems obvious. The kingdom of heaven would grow from tiny beginnings to a great **tree** and would ultimately provide shelter, protection, and benefit to the entire world. When Christians live in obedience to the Lord, they are a blessing to those around them. Individual believers become the source of benediction to nations. And with all their faults, those nations of the world who have been so influenced and who have recognized God’s sovereignty and have sought to build their laws and standards of living on His Word have proved a blessing to the rest of the world in economic, legal, cultural, and social ways as well as spiritual and moral. It is from the teachings of Scripture through Christian witness that high standards of education, justice, the dignity of women, the rights of children, prison reform, and countless other such social benefits have come. Whenever the gospel of the kingdom of God is faithfully preached and practiced, all the world benefits.

What the church is to the world is a macrocosm of what a believing spouse is to an unbelieving husband or wife. Just as the unbelieving partner is sanctified through the one who believes (1 Cor. 7:14), the unbelieving world is to a degree sanctified by the presence of the true church. Jesus’ point is that, in spite of great opposition, represented by the three bad soils and the tares, His kingdom will start small and spread in power and influence to become victorious.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE LEAVEN (13:33)**

As always, Jesus constructed the parable out of the common experiences of His hearers. In every household the **woman** responsible for baking would save a piece of leavened dough from a risen batch just before it was baked. When the next batch of dough was mixed, she **took** the saved piece from the previous batch and **hid** it in the new, in order that its **leaven**, or yeast, could ferment the new batch of dough and make it rise. **Three pecks of meal** was about the equivalent of a modern bushel. But such a large batch of dough was not uncommon in most households of the day, because bread was the major item of food. That was about the same amount of bread that Abraham asked Sarah to bake for the Lord and the two angelic visitors (Gen. 18:6) and that Gideon prepared before the angel of the Lord at Ophrah (Judg. 6:19).

The first point in this parable is that small things can have \_\_\_\_\_, in the way that a small piece of leavened dough can permeate a large piece of unleavened dough to make it rise. The power of **the kingdom of heaven** is great, far greater than its initial size and appearance would suggest. The smallest part of **the kingdom** that is placed in the world is sure to have influence, because it contains the power of God’s own Spirit. The influence of **the kingdom** is the influence of the King, of His Word, and of His faithful people.

The second point of the parable is that the influence is \_\_\_\_\_. Leavened bread has always been considered tastier and more enjoyable than unleavened. To symbolize the break

with their former life in Egypt, God commanded His people to eat only unleavened bread during the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, which began on Passover evening. They were not even allowed to have leaven of any sort in the house during the seven days of the feast (Ex. 12:15, 18–19). But the bread they ate the rest of the year was leavened and perfectly acceptable to the Lord. To the average person of Jesus' day, Jew or Gentile, there is no evidence that **leaven** carried any connotation of evil or corruption.

The ancient rabbis often referred to leaven in a favorable way. One of them wrote, "Great is peace, in that peace is to the earth as leaven is to the dough." When a Jewish girl was married, her mother would give her a small piece of leavened dough from a batch baked just before the wedding. From that gift of leaven the bride would bake bread for her own household throughout her married life. That gift, simple as it was, was among the most cherished that the bride received, because it represented the love and blessedness of the household in which she grew up and that would be carried into the household she was about to establish...

Because leaven causes fermentation, some interpreters insist that in Scripture it always signifies that which is evil and corrupting when it is used figuratively. But such a restrictive view is arbitrary and certainly does not fit the present text. Jesus specifically says that **the kingdom of heaven**, the most positive of all influences imaginable, **is like leaven**. To take this **leaven** as representing evil that permeates the kingdom is to twist the obvious meaning and construction of words—whether in the Greek or English texts. Nor does that interpretation fit Jesus' development of this group of parables, in which this one parallels that of the mustard seed. They both illustrate the power of the kingdom to overcome the resistance and opposition illustrated in the parables of the sower and of the wheat and tares.

Even when leaven is used in relation to something evil, as in Jesus' warning about "the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1), the point is not that leaven and hypocrisy are both inherently evil but that they both are inherently pervasive and powerful in their influence. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul uses leaven in the same way—not to illustrate the evil of legalism (which is great) but rather to point up its great influence: "A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough" (5:9).

As Paul indicts the Corinthians for arrogant indifference to the gross immorality of some of the church members, he states the same well-known proverb that he uses in Galatians and that Jesus had in mind in this parable: "Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough?" (1 Cor. 5:6). He is speaking in the context of demanding that believers remove immoral members from their midst, in order that the evil conduct might not contaminate the rest of the church (vv. 2–5). Here again, the figure of leaven is used in regard to something evil, but the focus of the analogy is not on common evil but on common permeation.

As Paul continues his warning to the Corinthians, he also uses leaven to represent discontinuation. Israel under Moses was commanded not to take any leaven from bread in Egypt as they prepared to leave that land of captivity and oppression and journey toward the Promised Land. In the same way, Christians are commanded to "clean out the old leaven" of

“malice and wickedness” that characterized their unsaved lives and take nothing of it into their new life in Christ (1 Cor. 5:7–8a). The bread of their new life in Christ is then called “the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (v. 8b).

But no analogy can be pressed too far. In this instance Paul uses leaven to illustrate the discontinuity that should be evident between an unsaved and a saved life. The relationship of leaven to the evil of the old life and of no leaven to the righteousness of the new life is incidental. The focus is on discontinuity, just as in the parable it is on permeation and influence.

In following out the story of the Exodus it becomes clear that, after the seven restricted days, the Israelites were again allowed to make leavened bread—though not from *Egyptian* leaven. At the Feast of Pentecost, in fact, the bread offered to the Lord *had* to be “baked with leaven” (Lev. 23:17), which He would hardly have required had leaven intrinsically represented evil. Otherwise that feast would have been a perpetual reminder of God’s tolerance of evil rather than of His holiness and goodness (v. 21). The term *leaven* can incidentally represent something that is good, evil, or morally and spiritually neutral, depending on how it is used. But the primary analogy pertains to pervasive influence, which is leaven’s most obvious and distinctive characteristic.

A third lesson of this parable is that the positive influence of the kingdom comes from \_\_\_\_\_ . The **leaven** must be **hid** in order to have any impact. The idea here is not that of hiding so as not to be seen but rather of hiding in the sense of penetrating deeply, completely permeating the world as leaven completely permeates the dough. Christians are not to be *of* the world, but we are to be *in* the world, because that is the only way the gospel can reach and affect the world (John 17:14–16). Christ sends His people into the world just as the Father sent Him into the world (v. 18). The supreme purpose of the church is to “go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

## Conclusion

When **the kingdom of heaven** is faithfully reflected in the lives of believers, its influence in the world is both pervasive and positive. The life of Christ within believers is spiritual and moral leavening in the world. A Christian does not have to be a national leader, a famous entertainer, or a sports figure to influence the world for his Lord. It is the power of God’s kingdom within a believer that makes his witness effective, and that is the influence on the world that Christians should seek to have.

That the meaning of these two parables was immediately clear to the disciples is seen in the fact that afterward they did not ask Jesus to explain them. Instead they asked Him to explain the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:36). The obvious purpose of the mustard seed and leaven parables was to encourage the disciples and all subsequent believers.

Each week, hundreds of new churches are started throughout the world. In China—which is still closed to missionary work, overt evangelism, and free worship—it is estimated that there are

perhaps 50 million or more Christians! Most of the world's people have the Scriptures printed in their own language, and more and more languages are added to the list each year. Through radio and literature, many millions are being reached with the gospel who could never personally hear it preached or taught.

But evangelism and other work and witness of the church often seem to have little immediate or noticeable effect. Even with the great growth and impact of the church in the world today, from the human perspective the world seems to be winning the contest for men's souls by a wide gap. As the church grows in numbers, so does world population; and, by comparison, God's people are still a remnant. As thousands of new converts are won daily in some countries, in others the church is losing membership and influence.

How much more reason did the disciples have for being discouraged and perplexed about the prospects of Christ's kingdom on earth? The Messiah Himself was daily meeting more and more opposition and receiving more and severer threats against His life. The twelve knew that they themselves were totally unprepared to win the world for the Lord. If the Son of God Himself was rejected and put to death, what could a handful of His weak, insignificant followers hope to accomplish after He was gone?

But Jesus' purpose in these two parables, as in many others teachings, was to assure the apostles, the early church, and every believer in every age that ultimately His kingdom not only would not fail but would prosper and grow Christianity will win, evil will be destroyed, and Jesus will reign. Christ Himself is building His church, and the very "gates of Hades [death itself] shall not overpower it" (Matt. 16:18).

## Lesson 59 (3-16-25)

### Entering the Kingdom (Matthew 13:44-46)

<sup>44</sup> “The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

<sup>45</sup> “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, <sup>46</sup> who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.

- Matthew 13:44-46 ESV

### Summary

There were no formal banks in Jesus’ time, so treasures were often hidden in fields. The parable of the hidden treasure is not about buying one’s salvation but about the surpassing value of the treasure unseen by others. The kingdom is more valuable than any sacrifice made to acquire it. Balancing the previous parable, the parable of the pearl illustrates that instead of simply stumbling across hidden treasure, a diligent search by one qualified to know its value will ultimately lead to the kingdom of God.<sup>1</sup>

### Discussion Questions

What do the parables of the hidden treasure (13:44) and the valuable pearl (13:45–46) teach about the kingdom?

What greater clarity do these parables add to the call to self-denial in Matthew 10:38–39?

How could you use the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl of Great Price to respond to someone who said, “I want to follow Jesus, but I don’t want to make drastic changes in my life”?

What might it look like in your life to value the kingdom of heaven above all else?

Have you experienced moments of joy in following Christ that made sacrifices feel worthwhile?

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<sup>1</sup> David Gundersen, “Psalms,” in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1313.

Are there things in your life you struggle to let go of in order to fully pursue God's kingdom?  
How can you take steps to surrender those?

How can we help others recognize the incomparable value of the kingdom of heaven?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting?  
Encouraging?

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *John F. MacArthur Jr., Matthew, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 381–391.*]

In the first four of the eight kingdom parables in Matthew 13, Jesus focuses on men's various responses to God's kingdom, on its present coexistence with Satan's kingdom, and on its power and influence in the world. A basic question that would naturally have arisen in the minds of Jesus' hearers was, "How does one become a part of God's kingdom?" "Are people simply born into it, like they are born into citizenship of their country?" they wondered. "Or is it like being a Jew? Are we, as Jews, automatically citizens of the kingdom because we are descendants of Abraham, or must we do something else?" In this third couplet of parables the Lord teaches about appropriating salvation and thereby becoming a citizen of God's kingdom and a member of His family.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE HIDDEN TREASURE (13:44)**

As He does in the other parables, Jesus builds this simple story around an experience or situation familiar to His hearers. Few, if any, would themselves have found such a treasure; but the practice of hiding valuables in the ground was common. Because there were no banks or other public depositories, most people protected their valuables in a secret spot in the ground. When they needed money or decided to sell or trade a piece of jewelry, for instance, they would go to the place at night, uncover the jar or storage box, take out what was desired, and rebury the rest.

Because Palestine had been a battleground for hundreds of years, families would often even bury food, clothing, and various household objects to protect them from plundering enemy soldiers. The famed Jewish historian Josephus wrote, "The gold and the silver and the rest of that most precious furniture which the Jews had and which the owners treasured underground was done to withstand the fortunes of war." Over the years, the ground of Palestine became a veritable treasure house. When the owner of buried treasure died or was forcefully driven from the land—sometimes deported to a foreign land such as Assyria or Babylon—the treasure would be forever lost unless someone accidentally discovered it, as occasionally happened.

No doubt that was the fate of the **treasure hidden in the field, which a man found and hid** again. The man may have stumbled over part of the **treasure** or seen some of it protruding above ground as he happened to pass through the **field**. Or he may have been a hired hand who inadvertently dug it up while plowing or cultivating. In any case, the **field** did not belong to him, because, **from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has, and buys that field**.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE PEARL OF GREAT (13:45–46)**

An *emporos* (**merchant**) was a wholesale dealer, whose business was to buy and resell merchandise. He would travel about the country, perhaps to many countries, looking for items to buy and then sell for a profit. This particular **merchant** spent his time **seeking fine pearls**. He probably made regular visits to the various coastal areas where pearls were harvested and haggled with the divers or their employers over prices. Diving for pearls was extremely hazardous, and many divers lost their lives or ruined their health in obtaining the oysters that contained the beautiful gems. That fact, in addition to their scarcity and natural beauty, made **pearls** extremely precious.

**Pearls** were the most highly valued gems in the ancient world and were often bought as investments, much as diamonds are today. In the form of **pearls**, a great amount of wealth could be kept in a small space—concealed in one’s clothing while traveling or buried in a field for safekeeping, as was the treasure of the previous parable...When the **merchant** came across **one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it**. Obviously the **merchant** considered that particular pearl to have been worth more than all his other pearls together, because they would have been included in the sale of **all that he had**. Because the emphasis of these parables is personal appropriation of **the kingdom of heaven**, the message is obviously one of salvation. In this context, **the kingdom of heaven** represents the saving knowledge of God through trust in His Son and all the benefits and glory that relationship brings.

### **LESSONS FROM THE PARABLES**

From the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price we can learn at least six valuable lessons about **the kingdom**, and therefore about salvation: it must be personally appropriated, it is priceless, it is not superficially visible, it is the source of true joy, it may be entered from different circumstances, and it is made personal by a transaction.

### **THE KINGDOM MUST BE \_\_\_\_\_**

The central truth of these two parables is that the kingdom of heaven must be personally appropriated. It is not obtained by natural inheritance, as one automatically becomes a member of his parents’ race or a citizen of their country. Both parables center around a single individual who sacrifices all that he has in order to personally obtain that which has become immeasurably valuable to him.



Every human being is under God's dominion in the sense that he lives on the earth—which is under the Lord's ultimate control, despite Satan's temporary and limited power over it. And an unbeliever who associates with believers can benefit from many blessings of the kingdom because of that association. Nevertheless, although an unbeliever may attend an evangelical church, enjoy biblical preaching, and be a professing and baptized member of a church, he is not a citizen of the kingdom. Such superficial and nongenuine "sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness," where "there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 8:12).

As Paul reminded his Jewish brethren, "They are not all Israel who are descended from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants" (Rom. 9:6–7). Even under the Old Covenant a person could be a Jew racially, nationally, and religiously—fully identified with God's chosen people in those outward ways—and yet have no part in the true, spiritual Israel. In the same way, a person can be born into a family who traces its church membership back for many generations, and yet have no part in Christ's true church. Although it gives many advantages, even being born into a family of godly believers does not make a person a Christian. To be saved, he must make his own decision to receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

#### **THE KINGDOM IS \_\_\_\_\_**

The parables express the value of salvation through the idea that it is worth selling all one possesses in order to receive it...The value of God's kingdom far exceeds that of all earthly riches and advantages together—and would still exceed them in worth even if they brought the satisfaction they promise. Yet God offers His priceless kingdom to any person, no matter how poor, how insignificant, how sinful, who trusts in Christ. The price is the same for everyone—all they have. For those whose hearts are genuinely turned to Christ, whatever values they have clung to in the past will be exchanged eagerly for this priceless treasure.

#### **THE KINGDOM IS NOT \_\_\_\_\_**

When Jesus was "questioned by the Pharisees as to when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, "Look, here it is!" or "There it is!"' " (Luke 17:20–21). The kingdom will not be observable until Jesus returns and establishes His millennial rule over the earth. At that time He "is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels," and men will "see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom" (Matt. 16:27–28). But the present kingdom "is not of this world" (John 18:36).

"A natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God," Paul tells us; "for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised" (1 Cor. 2:14). In his next letter to Corinth the apostle further explains that "the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4). Even when the truth of the gospel is clearly presented to him, the natural man cannot see it. As long as he resists the moving of God's Spirit on his heart, he cannot see past the spiritual blinders Satan has placed over his

eyes. He is completely content to seek his ephemeral pleasures and the things which can never satisfy, considering the trinkets of the world to be of great value and the gospel of salvation to be worthless...

The treasure of salvation is not obvious to men, and it is therefore not something they naturally seek. They do not understand why it is so prized by Christians and why some people give up so much—their self-dependency, sinful pleasures, and sometimes even their social, political, and economic freedom and welfare—to gain what seems to be so little. They cannot understand why believers willingly live by standards of ethics and morality that go against man’s deepest drives and lusts. The way of the kingdom is narrow and unattractive to the natural man, and that is why so few find it or desire to walk in it once it is found (Matt. 7:14).

The full value of a pearl may not be evident to the average person, who may admire its beauty yet be unaware of its priceless nature. Many people have passing admiration for Jesus and the gospel but are totally unaware of the supreme and priceless gift that could be theirs in belonging to Him. They see the pearl in plain view, but to their worldly eyes it has little worth. Jesus “was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man. He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him” (John 1:9–11).

**THE KINGDOM IS THE SOURCE OF \_\_\_\_\_**

It was from joy that the man sold all he had in order to buy the field that held the priceless treasure. Joy is a basic desire in every human being and is the desire that all the others either directly or indirectly serve. We like to eat because food brings joy and satisfaction to our palate and a good feeling and health to our bodies. The desire for money is primarily based in the joy we hope to find in the things money can buy. Fame, power, knowledge, and all other things we long after are desired for the joy it is hoped they will bring. Even the miser, who seems to love money for its own sake, hoards his possessions for the joy the hoarding brings. Some people thrive on misery, because they find joy in feeling sorry for themselves.

Yet all of those joys are temporary and disappointing. The only true and eternal joy is the joy found in Christ and His kingdom, because man was made by God for Himself. Human satisfaction can be found only in God’s divine provision...

**THE KINGDOM MAY BE ENTERED FROM \_\_\_\_\_**

A fifth principle found in these two parables is that a person may come into the kingdom out of different circumstances. There is no precondition for turning from sin and turning to Christ in faith. A person does not have to become anything else before he becomes a Christian, and he can come from wherever he may be...

**THE KINGDOM IS MADE PERSONAL BY A \_\_\_\_\_**

In both parables the priceless object was bought at the expense of every possession the finder owned. For that reason some Christians feel uncomfortable about these parables, because they seem to teach that salvation can be bought. But from beginning to end, Scripture makes

abundantly clear that salvation is totally the free gift of God. Yet interpreted in the right way, salvation is bought in the sense that the person who accepts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior surrenders everything he has to Him.

In all parables, the physical and earthly is used to illustrate the spiritual and heavenly. In these two parables the economic transaction of buying represents the spiritual transaction of surrender. There is an exchange in salvation. The old is exchanged for the new...

## Conclusion

Jesus shifts from talking about the eventual worldwide impact of the kingdom to talking about the parables of the Treasure and the Pearl. The story of the man who finds a treasure in a field may sound strange to our ears, but remember that Jesus is telling this parable in a day when treasure could not be stored in safety deposit boxes or well-protected banks. Instead, people would simply bury their greatest possessions in a remote place. This particular treasure had apparently been completely forgotten, even by the owner of the field. The man who found the treasure went and sold everything he had to buy that field, knowing that it was worth more than everything else he owned put together. People may have thought that he was crazy, but he wasn't. He was wise and happy, for he knew he had found something worth losing everything for.

The parable of the Priceless Pearl communicates a similar truth to the parable of the Treasure, though the man who found the pearl was actually *searching* for these fine jewels (Blomberg, *Matthew*, 224). Still, the pearl that he finds far exceeds his expectations. Both for those who are searching and those who are surprised, **the kingdom of heaven is something worth losing everything for**. There is great reward in submitting to the redemptive rule and reign of God in Christ, and this reward is greater than everything this world offers. As Paul says in Philippians 3:8, "I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ." Jesus and the kingdom that He calls us to are better than money, health, strength, and even our own families. Christ is supremely satisfying in such a way that if you lose everything on this earth, but you get the kingdom of heaven, you have a happy trade-off. And nothing in eternity can ever take away this great treasure.

Because the kingdom of heaven is something worth losing everything for, **we joyfully let go of all things in order to passionately take hold of one thing**. Jesus is speaking to disciples who, like the merchant seeking for pearls, would lose much for following Christ; in fact, most of them would lose their lives. But they were following a King who promised, "And everyone who has left houses, brothers or sisters, father or mother, children, or fields because of My name will receive 100 times more and will inherit eternal life" (Matt 19:29). We come to Christ because He offers great reward; He *is* great reward.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 183.

## Lesson 60 (3-23-25)

### Judgment and Proclamation (Matthew 13:47-52)

<sup>47</sup> “Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and gathered fish of every kind. <sup>48</sup> When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

<sup>51</sup> “Have you understood all these things?” They said to him, “Yes.” <sup>52</sup> And he said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.”

- Matthew 13:47-52 ESV

### Summary

The parable of the net describes final judgment at the end of the age, when the good will be separated from the bad (cf. vv. 24–30, 36–43). When Jesus comes in power, he will send his angels to initiate judgment by separating the wicked (those who have denied the gospel) from the righteous (those who have believed and entered the kingdom of heaven). True disciples grow in understanding as they respond positively to Jesus’ parables and explanations. They draw spiritual truth from Jesus’ parables and recognize how this truth fulfills promises in the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup>

### Discussion Questions

What does the parable of the net tell us about the judgment to come (13:47–50)?

According to Scripture, what will Hell be like? Does the reality of Hell motivate you to share the gospel?

How does this parable compare with the parable of the weeds (vv. 24-30)?

How did the disciples respond to Jesus’ question in 13:51? How did Jesus respond? What was His point?

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<sup>1</sup> David Gundersen, “Psalms,” in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1313.

Read the story of the rich, young ruler in Matthew 19:16–26. What was he asked to give up? Why? Does Jesus' request change from person to person? What might He request of you?

Since Jesus is clear about what will happen to the ungodly (see Matthew 13:49–50), list areas where you can be more daring in your effort to reach others with the gospel. What do you intend to do about these areas this week? This month? This year?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *John F. MacArthur Jr., Matthew, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 393–401.*]

The last two of the eight parables on the kingdom found in Matthew 13 illustrate the separation and judgment of unbelievers and the preaching and teaching of God's ministers. The first gives a warning, and the second gives a call to proclaim that warning to a condemned world.

### **THE PARABLE OF THE DRAGNET—JUDGMENT (13:47–50)**

In the previous parables Jesus illustrated the nature of the kingdom, the power and influence of the kingdom, and the personal appropriation of the kingdom. Now He focuses again (see v. 42) on the judgment connected with the kingdom. The parable of the dragnet is a frightening warning about what happens to the wicked when they are separated from the righteous in the last days. Here Jesus gives a vivid picture of judgment, a brief explanation of the principle of judgment, and a sobering warning about the peril of judgment.

#### **THE \_\_\_\_\_ (13:47–48)**

The activity Jesus uses to illustrate God's judgment on unbelievers was a common one to His hearers. It was especially familiar to those who lived near the Sea of Galilee, and most especially to those, including several of the disciples, who were fisherman. On the Sea of Galilee three basic methods of fishing were employed, all of which are still used there today. The first was with a line and hook, which was used to catch one fish at a time. That was the type of fishing the Lord instructed Peter to do when they needed money to pay the two-drachma tax (Matt. 17:24–27).

The other two types of fishing involved nets. One net was a small, one-man casting net called an *amphiblēstron*...A second type of net was the *sagēnē*, a very large **dragnet**, or seine, that

required a team of fishermen to operate and sometimes covered as much as a half square mile. It was pulled into a giant circle around the fish, between two boats out in deep water or by one boat when working from the shore. In the latter case, one end of the net would be firmly moored on shore while the other was attached to the boat, which would make a large circle out into the water and come back to the starting place. Floats were attached to the top of the net and weights to the bottom, forming a wall of net from the surface to the bottom of the lake.

Because the net permitted nothing to escape, all sorts of things besides the desirable fish were caught. It swept everything in its path—weeds, objects dropped overboard from boats, all manner of sea life, and **fish of every kind**. **When the net was filled**, it would take a large number of men several hours just to drag **it up on the beach**. Then **they sat down, and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away**. The **fish** to be carried to a distant market would be put in **containers** with water to keep the fish alive, and those that were to be sold nearby were placed in dry **containers**, usually baskets.

### THE \_\_\_\_\_ (13:49)

Jesus begins His interpretation of the parable by explaining that the separation of the good and bad fish represents God's judgment **at the end of the age**. The parable of the wheat and tares illustrates the coexistence of believers and unbelievers in the present form of the kingdom, and this parable illustrates their separation as the form of the kingdom changes.

In His interpretation of the parable of the wheat and tares Jesus stated the same truth He gives here: **At the end of the age [His] angels shall come forth, and take out the wicked from among the righteous** (cf. vv. 39–41). During the present era, which is the church age, God permits unbelief and unrighteousness. But the time is coming when His toleration will end and His judgment begins. The first phase of judgment will be the separation of **the wicked from among the righteous**, the tares from among the wheat. The dragnet of God's judgment moves silently through the sea of mankind and draws all men to the shores of eternity for final separation to their ultimate destiny—believers to eternal life and unbelievers to eternal damnation.

Men move about within that net as if they were forever free. It may touch them from time to time, as it were, startling them. But they quickly swim away, thinking they have escaped, not realizing they are completely and inescapably encompassed in God's sovereign plan. The invisible web of God's judgment encroaches on every human being just as that of the dragnet encroaches on the fish. Most men do not perceive the kingdom, and they do not see God working in the world. They may be briefly moved by the grace of the gospel or frightened by the threat of judgment; but they soon return to their old ways of thinking and living, oblivious to the things of eternity. But when man's day is over and Christ returns to set up His glorious kingdom, then judgment will come.

Jesus is not giving a full description of the last days, but is concentrating on the judgment of unbelievers. He is speaking of judgment in general, with special focus on what is referred to as the final judgment at the great white throne (Rev. 20:11–15). There "the dead, the great and the small" will be "judged, everyone of them" (vv. 12–13)...Over and over Jesus warns about

the horrors of hell and pleads with men to avoid it by coming to Him for salvation. He warned that, just as in the days of Noah before the flood, people will be “eating and drinking, ... marrying and giving in marriage.... Then there shall be two men in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken, and one will be left” (Matt. 24:38, 40–41).

God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:23) and does not desire that anyone perish (2 Pet. 3:9). The Lord wept over Jerusalem because the people would not come to Him and be saved (Luke 19:41). He warned about hell not to put people in agony but to save them from it. Hell was not even created for men but for the devil and his fallen angels (Matt. 25:41).

### THE \_\_\_\_\_ (13:50)

Perhaps no doctrine is harder to accept emotionally than the doctrine of hell. Yet it is too clear and too often mentioned in Scripture either to deny or to ignore. Jesus spoke more of hell than any of the prophets or apostles did—perhaps for the reason that its horrible truth would be all but impossible to accept had not the Son of God Himself absolutely affirmed it. It had special emphasis in Jesus’ teaching from the beginning to the end of His earthly ministry. He said more about hell than about love. More than all other teachers in the Bible combined, He warned men of hell, promising no escape for those who refused His gracious, loving offer of salvation.

In the Sermon on the Mount alone, the Lord gives several specific and direct warnings about hell: “Whoever shall say, ‘You fool,’ shall be guilty enough to go into the fiery hell” (Matt. 5:22), and, “It is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell” (v. 29; cf. v. 30; 18:8–9; Mark 9:43). Jesus declares that the wicked “sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. 8:12) and that unbelieving Capernaum would “descend to Hades” (11:23; cf. Luke 10:15). He asked the evil and hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, “How shall you escape the sentence of hell?” (Matt. 23:33). On many other occasions Jesus alludes to hell and warns about damnation (5:20; 7:13, 19, 23, 27; 10:28; 12:36; 16:18; 18:8–9; 21:43–44; 23:14–15; 24:40–41, 51; 25:30, 46; Mark 3:29; Luke 12:9–10, 46; 16:23; John 5:29; 15:6).

Hell is not merely the fate of forever reliving bad memories or of going out into nothingness, as many people believe and teach. Nor is it a place where sinners will continue their sinning, unrestrained and unrebuked. There will be no pleasure at all in hell, not even the perverted pleasure of sin—only its punishment...The human mind cannot begin to conceive of the eternal horror that is hell. Even the biblical figures related to hell are only suggestive, because the finite mind cannot comprehend infinite pain and torment any more than it can comprehend infinite joy and bliss. But from God’s Word we learn four basic truths about **the furnace of fire** that will help us to partially grasp its terror.

First, hell is a place of constant torment, misery, pain. The torment is often described as darkness (Matt. 22:13), where no light can penetrate, and nothing can be seen. Throughout the numberless eons of eternity the damned will never again see light or anything that light illumines. Hell’s torment is also described as fire that will never go out and cannot be

extinguished (Mark 9:43) and from which the damned will never find relief. Hell could not be other than a place where **there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth**.

Second, hell will involve the torment of both body and soul. Neither the soul nor the body is annihilated at death; nor will they ever be. When an unsaved person dies, his soul goes out from the presence of God into everlasting torment. At the resurrection of all the dead, the bodies of the unsaved will be raised, and those resurrected bodies will join the soul in hell's torment (Matt. 10:28; cf. John 5:29; Acts 24:15; Rev. 20:11–15). Just as believers will be fitted with resurrected bodies so they can enjoy the glories of heaven forever, unbelievers will be fitted with resurrected bodies so they can endure the torments of hell without being destroyed....

Third, the torments of hell will be experienced in varying degrees. For everyone in hell the suffering will be intense and permanent, but some will experience greater torment than others. "Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses," says the writer of Hebrews. "How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?" (Heb. 10:28–29). Those who willfully reject Jesus Christ and trample, as it were, on the sacrifice He made for them with His own blood will receive much greater punishment than those who had only the light of the Old Covenant. And on the day of judgment it will be more tolerable for the pagan cities of Tyre, Sidon, and Sodom than for the Jewish cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum—who not only had the light of the Old Covenant but the opportunity to see and hear the Son of God in person and to witness His miraculous works (Matt. 11:22–23)...

Fourth, the torment of hell will be everlasting. Nothing will be so horrible about hell as its endlessness. Jesus uses the same word to describe the duration of hell as the duration of heaven: "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life" (Matt. 25:46). People in hell will experience the total absence of hope. Although God originally designed hell for the devil and his fallen angels, men who choose to follow Satan's way instead of God's will also suffer Satan's fate...

### **THE PARABLE OF THE HOUSEHOLDER: PROCLAMATION (13:51–52)**

**Understood** comes from *suniēmi*, which has the literal meaning of bringing or putting together. "Have you rightly put **all these things** together?" Jesus was asking. "**Have you understood** what I have been saying about the kingdom in these parables? Do you comprehend the truth that the present form of the kingdom will continue to have good and evil in it? Do you realize that believers will continue to grow in numbers and to permeate and influence the world? Do you know that entering the kingdom involves the recognition of the worthlessness of everything a person has apart from salvation in Jesus Christ? Do you see that the final separation of the righteous and wicked is inexorable and inescapable, and that the fate of both is eternal—the righteous to everlasting life and the wicked to everlasting punishment?"



In answer, the disciples **said to Him, “Yes.”** But from what they later said and did, we know their understanding was far from perfect. But Jesus accepted their response as genuine; otherwise He would not have said to them the words of verse 52. On the level at which they were able to understand at that time, they **understood**. Jesus had instructed the disciples to “beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest” (Matt. 9:38)—to proclaim the coming harvest of judgment and to warn men of it and tell them how to escape it while they could. In the following four chapters we see Him specifically call them to this ministry and begin teaching, training, and in every way preparing them for it.

Based on their affirmative response, Jesus then **said to them, “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household.** A *grammateus* (**scribe**) literally referred to one who wrote. But among Jews the term had long carried the distinctive connotation of a man who was a learner, interpreter, and teacher of the law, God’s revealed Word that we now call the Old Testament. Although the scribes and rabbis had added so much tradition that it subordinated and often contradicted God’s true Word (Matt. 15:6), their purported task was to study and interpret Scripture. They were the theologians of Judaism, and many were members of the high Jewish council, the Sanhedrin.

Under Jesus’ instruction, each of the twelve was becoming a genuinely learned **scribe** and a true **disciple of the kingdom of heaven**. They had become **like a head of a household, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old**. The **head of a household** was responsible for the entire welfare of the family, and a major part of his duty was to maintain ample supplies of food, clothing, and all other **things** the members of the **household** might need. He kept these supplies in a storehouse, or **treasure**, from which he would dispense items as they were needed. The wise householder was frugal and was careful not to waste the supplies. When they were reusable, food that was uneaten and clothing that was no longer worn were returned to the **treasure** to be used again. When further need arose, economy demanded that these **old** supplies would be dispensed first, before any **things new** were issued.

The twelve disciples (learners) would become the twelve apostles (sent ones), Judas being replaced by Matthias (Acts 1:23). Through these twelve, along with Paul, the apostle appointed “last of all” (1 Cor. 15:8), the Lord entrusted the continued revelation of His Word and the founding of His church. They knew the **old** truths of His previous revelation and were being given additional truths that were **new**. They would proclaim the significance of both. **Brings forth** is from *ekballō* and carries the idea of casting out, scattering, or distributing widely. In this context it also connotes generosity, giving out the truth of God both wisely and liberally. Apart from the Lord Himself, the apostles were the supreme Bible scholars, preachers, teachers, and theologians of all time—scribes and disciples without equal (cf. Matt. 11:11).

## Conclusion

As is clear from the parables of the sower, the wheat and tares, and the dragnet, the message of the gospel is not simply the offer of heaven but a warning about hell. What makes the gospel such *good* news is its power to save men from the indescribably *bad* destiny toward which

every person without Christ is headed. A person does not have to choose hell to go there. He only has to refuse the claims of Jesus Christ—or do nothing at all.

Though not with the same degree of authority, Jesus' charge to the twelve is given to every believer, and in particular to those He has called to teach and preach His Word. It is an awesome responsibility to warn the unsaved about hell and to offer them the way of escape through our precious Lord. "Therefore knowing the fear [or terror] of the Lord," Paul says, "we persuade men" (2 Cor. 5:11). The Christian's heart is cold indeed who is not deeply concerned and exercised about those around him who are destined for the eternity of hell. To have the gift of eternal life but not to share it with those who now have only the prospect of eternal death is the epitome of selfishness and lovelessness.

Yet some who call themselves Christian refuse, in the name of love, to proclaim anything that is fearful or uncomfortable. I recently read that the purpose of a certain "Christian" broadcasting organization is "to be a good neighbor to a variety of listeners." The policy statement given to prospective broadcasters includes the instruction: "When you are preparing your program for these stations, please avoid using the following: criticism of other religions and references to conversion, missionaries, believers, unbelievers, old covenant, new covenant, church, the cross, crucifixion, Calvary, Christ, the blood of Christ, salvation through Christ, redemption through Christ, the Son of God, Jehovah or the Christian life. These people listening are hungering for words of comfort," the statement continues. "We ask you to adhere to these restrictions so that God's Word can continue to go forth. Please help us maintain our position of bringing comfort to suffering people."

How tragic that an organization dedicated to bringing comfort refuses to so much as mention the elements essential to the only message that can bring true peace and comfort to a troubled soul! Whatever message of comfort would be left after complying with the restrictions of that network would be the false comfort that damns people by leaving them content in their sins. Whatever the foolish motivation for such thinking, it could not be the love of Christ—who loved the world and its people too much not to warn of the imminent and eternal danger that faces every person apart from Him.



## Lesson 61 (3-30-25)

### The Power of Unbelief (Matthew 13:53-58)

<sup>53</sup> And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, <sup>54</sup> and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished, and said, "Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? <sup>55</sup> Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And are not his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Judas? <sup>56</sup> And are not all his sisters with us? Where then did this man get all these things?" <sup>57</sup> And they took offense at him. But Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household." <sup>58</sup> And he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.

- Matthew 13:53-58 ESV

### Summary

After teaching in parables, Jesus returns to his hometown of Nazareth, but the townspeople are not receptive to his teaching. They are familiar with Jesus' human roots, so they do not believe he can be a prophet, much less more than a prophet. Jesus aligns himself with the Old Testament prophets who had been consistently rejected by the people of Israel. The people's hardheartedness is an obstacle to their faith (cf. 5:29; 11:6). Hardheartedness and rejection prevent the ministry of the Spirit's healing, just as it prevents the forgiveness of sin (cf. 12:31–32).<sup>1</sup>

### Discussion Questions

How did the people in Jesus' hometown react to His teaching? Why do you think they reacted the way they did?

What specific questions did the people ask about Jesus (vv. 54-56)?

How does verse 57 describe their response to Jesus?

What does Jesus mean when He says, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown and in his own household" (v. 57)? Is this principle still valid today?

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<sup>1</sup> David Gundersen, "Psalms," in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1313.

Why do you think Jesus "did not do many mighty works there" (v. 58)? What role does faith play in experiencing God's power?

What does this passage teach us about unbelief?

How does this passage challenge us to examine our own faith and openness to Jesus working in unexpected ways?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *John F. MacArthur Jr., Matthew, vol. 2, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 405–414.*]

Beginning with 13:53 and continuing through the first part of chapter 16, Matthew records eight incidents in the life of the Lord that correspond to and demonstrate the truths presented in the two parables just mentioned... Just as faith has the power to bring forgiveness of sins and eternal life, unbelief has the power to hold a person in his sins and under the condemnation of eternal hell. Just as belief has the power to bring eternal happiness, joy, peace, and glory in God's presence, unbelief has the power to bring eternal sorrow, pain, and anguish in God's absence.

As the parable of the sower illustrates, most of the response Jesus faced and the disciples would face was that of unbelief. Whether unbelief comes from the heart beaten hard by sin, from the rocky heart covered by a shallow layer of superficial belief, or from the thorny heart whose worldliness chokes out the truth of the gospel—all unbelief is a matter of will. Unbelief is a choice; it is saying no to God in spite of the evidence. Matthew's account of the first incident illustrating the parable of the sower is preceded by the brief mention of Jesus' departure from Capernaum.

### **LEAVING CAPERNAUM (13:53)**

Jesus had been ministering in and around Capernaum for about a year, using it as His home base (see 4:13; 8:5). But the majority of the people who saw and heard Him in that region eventually fell away, manifesting their rejection either by blasé indifference or direct opposition. Because of that rejection, His last teaching there was done entirely in **parables**, in order that, "while seeing they [would] not see, and while hearing they [would] not hear, nor ...

understand” (13:13). After Jesus finished the **parables** on the kingdom, **He departed from there**. Because the Lord had spent more time there than anywhere else thus far in His ministry, Capernaum was especially guilty for rejecting Him. Earlier, Jesus had scorchingly rebuked them, saying, “And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day” (11:23).

Jesus had, in effect, pronounced a curse on Capernaum, and when **He departed from there**, that city’s doom was imminent. Jesus never went there again except as He passed through to minister elsewhere. He had come into the city and demonstrated power that could only have been from God. Yet the people would not have Him as Lord. Many marveled and some criticized, but few believed. Now Capernaum’s opportunity was passed, and she entered a decline into oblivion from which she never recovered. Today the city is in virtually the same state of ruin—without houses or people—that it was a few centuries after Jesus was there. Apparently the town and the synagogue enjoyed a period of worldly prosperity for a while, but archaeological excavations show increasing pagan influence on the Jews there. The last synagogue built in Capernaum, erected over the floor of the one where Jesus taught, was decorated with various animals and mythological figures. Having rejected the true God, the people were at the mercy of false ones.

### **RETURNING TO NAZARETH (13:54–58)**

Jesus’ **home town** was Nazareth, where Joseph and Mary went to live after returning from Egypt with their infant Son (2:23). It was to Nazareth that Jesus returned after His baptism and temptations (4:12–13); and we learn from Luke that the response to Him then was the same as it was on this occasion. Luke reports that, after the wilderness temptations, “Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit; ... And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read” (Luke 4:14<sup>a</sup>, 16).

Jesus had been away only a short while and was still a familiar figure in the synagogue, where it was “His custom” to be every Sabbath. The crowd assembled on this particular Sabbath was essentially the same as it had been for many years; but Jesus was not the same. During the intervening time He had begun His ministry and suddenly become famous, because from the onset of His work the “news about Him spread through all the surrounding district, ... and [He] was praised by all” (vv. 14<sup>b</sup>, 15<sup>b</sup>). After Jesus stood and read the familiar messianic text of Isaiah 61:1–2, He handed the scroll to the synagogue attendant and sat down to comment on the reading. (The reader always stood to read the Scripture and then sat down as he gave an interpretation, lest he give the impression that his comments were equal in authority to God’s Word.) As He began to interpret, Jesus said, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing”; and He probably made other comments as well. At first the people did not understand that Jesus was referring to Himself, because their initial response was quite favorable: “All were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, ‘Is this not Joseph’s son?’ ” (Luke 4:17–22).

Knowing that the people's praise was based merely on faithless recognition of His popularity and power, Jesus began to expose their real motives. He knew they wanted Him to duplicate in Nazareth the miracles He had performed in Capernaum. And He knew that if He complied with their demand they still would not accept Him as the Messiah, because "no prophet is welcome in his home town." In further rebuke of their hypocrisy and faithlessness, He reminded them that in the days of Elijah God had shut up the rain in Israel for three-and-a-half years and caused a great famine. During that time the Lord showed mercy on none of the many suffering widows in Israel but showed great mercy on a Gentile widow of Zarephath. He also reminded them that during the time of Elisha, God cleansed no lepers in Israel but did cleanse the leprosy of the Gentile Naaman of Syria (vv. 23–27). They could not have missed Jesus' powerful, rebuking point that a believing Gentile is dearer to God than an unbelieving Jew.

When Jesus made clear that He understood their wicked motives and would not bend to their hardhearted provincial desire to have their own display of miracles, "all in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things"; and they rose up and cast Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff" (vv. 28–29). In their attempt to kill Jesus, their evil character and unbelief became apparent. They wanted entertainment by Jesus and benefit for themselves from the miracle worker, not conviction of sin and a message of salvation by Jesus the Messiah. From Jesus' second, and similar, encounter with His former neighbors in Nazareth we can learn four important truths about unbelief:

#### **UNBELIEF \_\_\_\_\_ THE \_\_\_\_\_ (13:54)**

The people at the **synagogue** in Jesus' **home town** of Nazareth immediately recognized Him as the person they had known as a boy and young man. They also remembered that less than a year earlier He had worked miracles in other parts of Galilee, had impressed them with His great wisdom, and had so angered them by exposing their hypocrisy and unbelief that they tried to throw Him over the cliff to His death. It soon became evident on this trip to Nazareth that their basic attitude about Him had not changed. They were still **astonished** at His **wisdom** and His **miraculous powers**, and they still refused to recognize the obvious, asking again, **Where then did this man get all these things?**

How could the people for the second time reject Jesus as the Messiah, when it was so obvious that **these things**, at which they marveled, could only have come by God's power? In less than a year He had demonstrated profound wisdom and authority beyond anything the people had ever witnessed, or even heard of. He taught profoundly on virtually every subject related to life and death, time and eternity, truth and falsehood, righteousness and sin, God and man, heaven and hell. He taught about regeneration, worship, evangelism, sin, salvation, morality, divorce, murder, service, servanthood, pride, hate, love, anger, jealousy, hypocrisy, prayer, fasting, true and false doctrine, true and false teachers, the Sabbath, the law, discipleship, grace, blasphemy, signs and wonders, repentance, humility, dying to self, obedience to God, and countless other subjects. He taught the truth about everything that pertained to spiritual life and godliness (cf. 2 Pet. 1:3)...Despite the absence of traditional credentials, His spiritual and moral wisdom was so true and profound that it could not be refuted even by His severest critics.

In addition to teaching with great wisdom, Jesus had displayed supernatural power that all but banished sickness and disease from Palestine and had performed miracles of nature that astonished the most hardened skeptics. At the very least, it should have been clear that Jesus was a prophet of God unequalled by any of the Old Testament era. How could the people not believe Jesus was from God, when only divine power and wisdom could explain the greatness of what He said and did?

...Like the scribes and Pharisees, the people of Jesus' hometown synagogue refused to make the logical and obvious connection between His power and His divinity because they were willfully unbelieving. The seed of the gospel fell on the hard-packed soil of sin-loving hearts into which God's truth could not make the slightest penetration...Those who heard and saw Jesus did not reject Him for lack of evidence but in spite of overwhelming evidence. They did not reject Him because they lacked the truth but because they rejected the truth. They refused forgiveness because they wanted to keep their sins. They denied the light because they preferred darkness. The reason for rejecting the Lord has always been that men prefer their own way to His.

...When a person willfully rejects the Lord, even the most compelling evidence will not convince Him of divine truth...The person who has heard many clear presentations of the gospel but continually asks for more evidence of its truth simply reveals the obstinacy of his unbelief. As Jesus explained in the story of the rich man and Lazarus, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:31). The person who does not accept the light from God he already has will not believe no matter how much more light he is given.

### **UNBELIEF \_\_\_\_\_ THE \_\_\_\_\_ (13:55–56)**

Instead of accepting the obvious and overwhelming evidence that Jesus was the Messiah, the people of Nazareth focused their attention on the irrelevant. It was indeed surprising to see someone they had watched grow up and with whom they had gone to synagogue all His life suddenly come on the scene as a great leader—with no formal training and no recognition by the accepted religious hierarchy.

The facts that Jesus was **the carpenter's son** and the Son of **Mary**, that He had **brothers** named **James and Joseph and Simon and Judas** who everyone in Nazareth knew, and that He had **sisters** who still lived there were irrelevant to the issues of His being the Messiah or not. Although the Jews had many incomplete and false notions about the Messiah, they knew He was to come to earth as a man and that He would have to be born into *some* family and live in *some* community. But instead of feeling highly honored that God chose to place His Son in Nazareth to grow up into manhood—as **Mary** felt highly honored to be His mother (Luke 1:48)—the people were skeptical, jealous, and resentful.

From this text and numerous others (see, e.g., Matt. 12:46–47; Luke 2:7; John 7:10; Acts 1:14), it is clear that **Mary** did not live in perpetual virginity, as Roman Catholic heresy claims. After Jesus' birth, Joseph began normal marital relations with his wife, and she bore at least four sons and two daughters by him. **Mary** was a woman of extraordinary godliness, but she was no more



divine than any other woman ever born, and certainly was not the mother of God, as Catholic dogma maintains. She even referred to the Lord as “God my Savior” (Luke 1:47), affirming her own sinfulness and need of salvation.

Joseph had been a *tektōn* (**carpenter**), which was the general term for a craftsman who worked with hard material, including wood. He may also have worked with bricks and stones. In any case, he had surely built many houses, windows, doors, yokes, and other things for his neighbors in Nazareth; and many products of his workmanship were probably still being used in the village. Joseph was an ordinary laborer like most other men of the village, and Jesus learned carpentry under him and no doubt took over the business after Joseph died (see Mark 6:3).

...When He came to earth, Jesus emptied Himself of certain divine prerogatives, “taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7). And although He was sinless and morally perfect during every minute of His life, His perfection was clearly not of the sort that called attention to itself or set Him apart as strange or peculiar. To those who knew Him as a child and young man, Jesus was simply a carpenter and a **carpenter’s son**. It was partly over the commonness of Jesus and His family that the people of Nazareth stumbled. They found it impossible to accept Him even as a great human teacher, much less as the divine Messiah.

It is tragic that small issues can be used as great excuses for not believing. The people of Nazareth were like people throughout the history of the church who can find every foolish reason to justify their rejection of the gospel. They don’t like the attitude of the one who witnesses to them; they think most church people are hypocrites; they think the preacher is too loud or too soft, too stuffy or too overbearing; and the services are too formal or too informal. They are offended at the slightest things Christians do and construe the insignificant as being all important. They put up one smoke screen after another to excuse their unwillingness to believe the clear and demanding claims and promises of Christ...It is characteristic of unbelief to disguise itself, and in order to hide their self-satisfaction and refusal to accept the clear evidence about Jesus, the people of Nazareth dismissed Him on the basis of having known Him since He was a child and of knowing His family as ordinary citizens of the community. They allowed pride, jealousy, resentment, embarrassment, and a host of other wicked and petty feelings to fill their hearts and become barriers to salvation.

### **UNBELIEF \_\_\_\_\_ TO THE \_\_\_\_\_ (13:57)**

**Took offense** is from *skandalizō*, which has the basic idea of causing to stumble or trip up and is the term from which our English scandalize is derived. Jesus’ friends and former neighbors were offended by His claims. They were offended by His ordinary background, by the commonness of His family, the limits of His formal training, His lack of official religious status, and many other irrelevant or secondary issues.

We have no full account of what Jesus taught on either occasion in that Nazareth synagogue; but both times He offended the people by what He said. He unmasked their hypocrisy by exposing their wicked desire to see Him perform miracles for miracles’ sake (Luke 4:23); and He

probably talked to them about their sinfulness and need to repent. In any case, they became antagonistic and **took offense at Him**, because their unbelief blinded them to the truth He taught. “While seeing they [did] not see, and while hearing they [did] not hear, nor [did] they understand” (Matt. 13:13). As Paul declared to the Corinthian believers, Christ is “to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23). Until a person is willing to have the hard ground of his heart plowed up by God’s truth and to confess and forsake his sin, he will be offended by the gospel. Until a person faces his sin in penitence, the truth of the gospel is hidden from him, and the blessing of the gospel is lost to him.

Again (see Luke 4:24) Jesus reminded the people of Nazareth of the well-known proverb that a **prophet is not without honor except in his home town, and in his own household**. It is often difficult for those who have watched a child grow up as a neighborhood kid to later accept him as a community leader, government official, pastor, or such—to say nothing of accepting him as the divine Son of God! Even when the man is personally liked, it is not easy for him to gain the respect that an outsider of the same capabilities would enjoy. Jesus’ brothers eventually came to believe in Him as their Savior (Acts 1:14), but for several years after He began His ministry they did not (John 7:5).

#### **UNBELIEF \_\_\_\_\_ THE \_\_\_\_\_ (13:58)**

Some of Jesus’ miracles were done in direct response to personal faith; but many others, perhaps most of them, were done regardless of any specific expression of an individual’s faith. All of the miracles were done to strengthen the faith of those who believed in Him; but although God can perform miracles where there is no belief, He chose not to perform them where there was hard and willful unbelief. Unbelief, then, became a barrier to divine blessing, and because of the **unbelief** of the people of Nazareth, Jesus **did not do many miracles there**. Mark reports that “He could do no miracles there except that He laid His hands upon a few sick people and healed them” (Mark 6:5). It was not that Jesus lacked supernatural power while He was in Nazareth but that He chose to operate only in response to faith, with the result that the people’s unbelief prevented Him from fully exercising that power.

Just as believing saves the soul and enables the power of God to work in its fullness, so unbelief blocked the release of His power and dammed up the flood of His blessing. Jesus warned, “Do not give what is holy to dogs, and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you to pieces” (Matt. 7:6). The hardened unbeliever despises the precious truths and blessings of God and will even use them against the Lord and His people if he can. Jesus refused to bend to the request of the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees who wanted to see a sign from Him (Matt. 12:38). “He answered and said to them, ‘An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet’ ” (v. 39). Jesus’ miracles were of spiritual benefit only as they led to faith in Him or strengthened those who already believed. For those who refused to believe, His miracles had no spiritual value at all, and He would not perform them in order to entertain or to satisfy ungodly curiosity...As the Pharisees perfectly illustrate, when unbelief investigates the supernatural work of God, it comes up empty. It meets a dead end when it tries to probe divine things. It cannot recognize the works of God because it will not recognize the truth of God.

## Conclusion

In light of Matthew 13, I invite you, if you have not already, to **humbly and joyfully receive the message of the kingdom**. Let go of the guilt and shame of sin. Leave behind the pleasures and pursuits and possessions of this world, and find in Christ a King worth losing everything for. Receive His mercy, and submit to His good and gracious mastery of your life. Do not harden your heart toward Him, do not toy superficially with Him, and do not give Him token affection in the midst of your riches in this world. I invite you to yield your heart and mind and life to Him.

And when you do, and for all who have humbly and joyfully received the message of the kingdom, I invite you to **confidently and urgently spread the message of the kingdom**. The dragnet of God's judgment is moving silently through the sea of mankind, and one day soon He will draw all men to the shores of eternity for final separation to their ultimate destiny in either everlasting life or eternal death. We know His judgment is coming, so warn and plead and pray and work—sow the seed of the gospel—so that the people around you and people groups around the world know the good news of the kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 184–185.

## Lesson 62 (4-6-25)

### The Feeding of the Five Thousand (Matthew 14:13-21)

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus heard this, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself. But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. <sup>14</sup> When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. <sup>15</sup> Now when it was evening, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a desolate place, and the day is now over; send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves." <sup>16</sup> But Jesus said, "They need not go away; you give them something to eat." <sup>17</sup> They said to him, "We have only five loaves here and two fish." <sup>18</sup> And he said, "Bring them here to me." <sup>19</sup> Then he ordered the crowds to sit down on the grass, and taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven and said a blessing. Then he broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>20</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up twelve baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>21</sup> And those who ate were about five thousand men, besides women and children.

- Matthew 14:13-21 ESV

### Summary

John's execution and Jesus' rejection by his own hometown signal a lack of repentance and escalating opposition to God's kingdom. Jesus withdraws across the Sea of Galilee to prepare himself for the next phase of his mission. However, his popularity has not diminished, and a large crowd follows him on foot along the shore, bringing their sick for him to heal. In the evening, the disciples approach Jesus with a logistical problem. The people ought to be sent away to find food. But Jesus turns the responsibility back on the disciples, calling on them to provide for the needs of the people. The disciples' pooled resources consist of five loaves of bread and two fish, sufficient only for one person's afternoon meal.

Jesus takes the food and, in a typical posture of prayer, he blesses God for what will be a miraculous provision. Then he instructs the disciples to feed the crowd with the pieces. Miraculously, the resources are multiplied until all the people are satisfied. The number of leftover basketfuls is significant, recalling both the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 disciples/apostles. Jesus shows that in the face of huge need, disciples must look not to their small human resources but to the greatness of God's resources.<sup>1</sup>

### Discussion Questions

According to Matthew 14:13, Jesus' private retreat was short-lived. What happened? How did He react (14:14)? What implications does His response have for us?

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<sup>1</sup> David Gundersen, "Psalms," in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1314.

What happened when evening approached (14:15)? How did the disciples respond? How did Jesus answer them (14:16)?

The scene of Jesus' miraculous feeding recalls the nation of Israel wandering in the wilderness after the exodus and God's gracious provision of manna (Exodus 16). The significance of 12 basketfuls may be that it recalls the 12 tribes of Israel. How do the disciples' responses to Jesus in Matthew 14:15 parallel Moses' response to God in Numbers 11:21–22?

How might you have responded had you been one of the disciples? Why?

How much food did the disciples start with (14:17)? What did Jesus instruct them to do with it (14:18)? What did Jesus do with the food they brought Him (14:19)? How much food was left over (14:20–21)?

What did Jesus want His disciples to learn from this object lesson? What does He want us to learn from it?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *Daniel M. Doriani, Matthew 1 & 2*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, vol. 2, *Reformed Expository Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 13–23.]

More and more people who are not ready for the wilderness hike into it these days. They imagine that their global positioning devices will keep them from getting lost, that their water-resistant fabrics will prevent them from getting wet, and that their microfiber garments will keep them from getting cold. Above all, they imagine that their cell phones can always summon a rescue team. In Maine, in a short span of time, one hiker called the National Guard and asked them to send a rescue helicopter to lift him off a mountain because he was tired. Later, two women called the mountain patrol and demanded that a rescue team come and carry them off the mountain even though there were still four hours of daylight left. A few days later, a man called for a rescue helicopter because he was hiking too slowly and was afraid he would miss an important business meeting. Some people don't know what real trouble is, and as a result they do not understand a genuine rescue either.

In Matthew 14, people were in trouble and Jesus rescued them, but they did not rightly see their problem or the solution Jesus provided. Matthew 14 teaches us to see our problems accurately, to take them to our king, the Lord Jesus, to receive rescue from him, and to thank him for it.

### **KING JESUS LEADS A STRATEGIC RETREAT**

The text opens with a change of scene. Jesus heard that King Herod had slain John the Baptist, a prophet and the forerunner of Jesus. Therefore, to separate himself from his foes, Jesus withdrew by boat to a solitary place. This change was a long time coming. In Matthew 11, Israel failed to repent when it heard John's call to repentance, then refused to celebrate when they heard Jesus' joyful proclamation of the kingdom. They would neither mourn with John nor dance with Jesus (11:16–24). In Matthew 12, Jewish leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy and plotted his death. Jesus declared that they were a wicked generation (12:33–45). Then in Matthew 13, Jesus began to speak in parables. The goal, in part, was to hide Jesus' word from those who pervert it (13:11–17).

Later in Matthew 13 Jesus returned to his hometown and taught in the synagogue. The people there marveled at his wisdom and power, but they also wondered where he got them. They remembered that he was the son of an ordinary carpenter and that his mother, brothers, and sisters still lived nearby. Since Jesus did not descend from a great family, many took offense at him. So it goes, Jesus said, for a prophet has honor everywhere except in his hometown. The faithlessness was so great that Jesus could hardly perform a miracle there, for he refused to perform wonders in front of the hard-hearted (13:52–58; cf. 12:38–39).

Finally, in Matthew 14, King Herod murders John the Baptist, who is Jesus' ally. When word reaches Jesus, he decides to withdraw from the public eye. Instead, he will train his disciples in private. We might call this the adolescence of the disciples. They have been good children and, like the great majority of good children, they remain good when they reach the teen years. Nonetheless, adolescence does spell change.

The disciples struggled to understand why Jewish leaders were hostile, why the crowds were fickle. But the disciples' progress was painfully slow too. The disciples had bursts of confidence, of course. When Jesus finished teaching in parables, they affirmed that they understood everything (13:51). The disciples were not yet so well instructed as they thought, but they trusted Jesus and wanted to learn more, even if events and teachings baffled them rather often (see 14:28–31; 15:15–20; 15:32–34; 16:21–23; 17:4–6). They stayed with Jesus and they kept on listening and maturing. Matthew 14 describes a day when they did learn, even if it took a while.

Only two miracles are recorded in all four Gospels: the resurrection and the feeding of the five thousand. Each Gospel tells the story in its distinct way. While we focus on Matthew's account, we can learn from the other Gospels as well.

### **A PROBLEM FOR JESUS AND THE PEOPLE: NO BREAD**

At this moment, the local authorities were hostile (14:1–12) and the crowds so surrounded Jesus that he could hardly even eat or teach the Twelve (14:13–14; cf. Mark 6:31). So Jesus planned to withdraw to a solitary place. Yet somehow the crowds learned of his plans, saw him embark into the boat, and followed him: “When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick” (14:13–14).

Galilee is a modest lake that rests at the bottom of a bowl, so that it is quite possible to stand on the shore, follow the boats on the lake with the eye, and detect their probable destination. The crowds followed with their eyes, then their feet, so they arrived at Jesus’ intended destination before he did. Though he had been pursuing solitude, Jesus felt compassion when he saw the crowd. They were needy, like sheep without a shepherd (Matt. 9:35–36). Many were sick, so Jesus healed them and taught them. They stayed with him in that desolate place until the lack of food became a problem (14:15; Mark 6:35–36). We see, therefore, that Jesus continues to bless the crowds, even while he begins to focus on the Twelve.

### **THE DISCIPLES FACE THE CHALLENGE**

The day is wearing on and the twelve disciples see that neither Jesus nor the crowds seem interested in bringing events to a close. The hour is late and the place is remote, so they urge Jesus to send the crowds away, into the nearby villages. Once there, they should “buy themselves some food” (14:15). “Buy themselves” suggests the disciples’ view of the situation. Jesus took care of the crowds through the day, now they must go off and care for themselves. Jesus has shown them enough compassion for one day!

Jesus grasps their point and rejects it, saying, “They do not need to go away.” The disciples can do better than send the crowds off to fend for themselves. Jesus says, “*You* give them something to eat” (14:16). In the original, “you give” is an emphatic command. The disciples must address the problem, Jesus says, but he gives them no direction. They cannot dismiss the people; they must face the problem and solve it. The disciples are baffled. The situation seems impossible—John 6:6 says Jesus wanted them to grasp this—and they say so. It would cost two hundred denarii—roughly eight months’ wages for a laborer—to buy bread to feed the vast throng (Mark 6:37; John 6:7). They have no money and virtually no supply of food—only five loaves and two fish.

This food may be the personal supply of Jesus and the apostles, for we notice that they say, “We have five loaves ...” (Matt. 14:17; Luke 9:13). Yet John sketches a slightly different picture. There, Andrew presents a boy who has five loaves (or rolls) and two small fish. The disciples may have scoured the crowd for food and found him, or he may have been part of Jesus’ entourage—perhaps a boy to carry their personal supplies (John 6:9). Whoever *owned* the bread, we know that the supply was small. The loaves are made of barley (John 6:9). It is a

cheap grain—feed for animals and bread for the poor. Further, five loaves and two fish cannot possibly feed this throng. Jesus has set the disciples a problem they cannot solve. They must feed a multitude but have just five loaves and two fish. It is a little something, but for the task at hand, it is nothing.

Jesus wanted his disciples to see that their supply was hopelessly inadequate. John 6:6 says explicitly what Matthew implies. Jesus knew what he planned to do, but he wanted the disciples to see that *he* had to act.

### **HOW SHALL WE VIEW THE PROBLEM?**

The situation before us presents a vital spiritual lesson about inadequate resources and the way we view them. There are three options when we face severe limitations:

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The disciples tell Jesus the situation is hopeless and urge him to send the people away to fend for themselves. Jesus dismisses this suggestion outright. Something *can* be done and it *must* be done. “*You* feed them!” he commands. But soon enough he relieves the tension caused by their inability.

The disciples see nothing but the five loaves and the two fish. But Jesus knows they are enough in his hands. Therefore he commands them to bring the food to him (14:17–18). He also directs the people to sit on the green grass in groups of fifty and one hundred (Mark 6:39–40). Perhaps this keeps family groups together; perhaps the clusters ease the distribution of the food. Certainly, as the people arranged themselves in groups they began to anticipate that something would happen. The word translated “sit down” in Matthew 14:19 is actually a technical word (*anaklinō*) that means to recline. In antiquity, people reclined at *banquets*, so Jesus is hinting that they should prepare for a feast.

The miracle shows that what little we have may seem useless, but it is not, if we offer it to Jesus. Five loaves and two fish ordinarily feed two or three people. The disciples cannot feed the vast crowd. But if they give their food to Jesus, he can. So the miracle teaches us to trust in Christ to take our poor efforts and make them fruitful.

This is a principle that applies to so much of our service. When someone is in great need, we may be powerless to act and have no idea what to say, but somehow it is enough for us to listen. When someone is lonely, we may think to invite them into our home for a meal, only to realize that we had planned to eat leftovers. Yet leftovers, served with a hug and a smile, may be more than enough.

### **Frantic** \_\_\_\_\_

If the first error is despair, the second is just the opposite. We take matters into our hands, and try to solve the problem ourselves in a burst of frantic activity. After all his labor, the activist may offer up a prayer, asking God in to finish the job or bless his work. We think of the





## TWO KINDS OF PEOPLE WITNESS THE WORK OF JESUS

After the miracle ends, Matthew tells us that the crowd numbered five thousand males, and probably another five thousand women and five thousand children (14:21). But he tells us nothing more, which is odd, since we are accustomed to hearing that people respond to Jesus' miracles. They marvel, give thanks, call Jesus a prophet, and so on. But this time the crowd fails to comment. They do not seem to be impressed; they do not give thanks. Perhaps they have seen Jesus do so much that they hardly take notice anymore. This reminds us that Jesus delivers the undeserving, not the deserving. We do not merit his grace, we receive it. If we do thank God, it is because he quickened our hearts to do so.

John's Gospel paints a different but complementary picture. In John 6, the crowds respond, but in ways that show they have completely misconstrued the miracle. After Jesus feeds them, the crowds decide Jesus is the Messiah and try to crown him king by force (John 6:15). Jesus withdraws, but the people, still thinking of bread, follow him across the Sea of Galilee in pursuit of more food. Jesus says, "Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you" (6:27).

But the people are activists, so they ask him what they need to do to gain that food (6:28). Jesus replies, "Believe in the one [God] has sent," meaning himself (6:29). This they grasp, and ask, "What miraculous *sign* then will you give that we may ... believe?" They propose that Jesus make more bread. After all, their forefathers ate manna in the wilderness; if Jesus matches that, they say they will believe (6:30–31). Jesus points out their error (6:32). It is not, as you think, that Moses *gave* bread, in the past. Rather, "it is my Father who *gives* you the true bread from heaven." Indeed, Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (6:35).

Jesus' miracle shows he can supply bread, the staple of ancient diets, to alleviate physical hunger. But he points the people beyond their physical hunger to the spiritual hunger, which he alone can meet. That is the "significance" of the sign. Sadly, most people miss the point. In Matthew, the crowds eat, burp, and move on. In John, they beg for more bread. But the disciples did grasp the lesson. In John, Jesus keeps pushing people to look to him, not to bread, and many finally give up and leave (6:35–66). But the disciples stay. Jesus asks, "You do not want to leave too, do you?" No, they say, "To whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). The disciples hardly understand everything Jesus is saying. But they trust him, so they want to stay with him.

The first lesson is that we should turn to Jesus for bread, both to sustain our physical life and to find and sustain our spiritual life. He satisfies our needs and we should trust him to do so, in this life and forever. Second, Jesus does not provide for the deserving, but for the undeserving, for the thankless, including you and me. And he does so even when we do not thank him. This should make us humble...

## Conclusion

The Gospels generally spell out their lesson, but here we encounter one of the texts that leave certain points unstated. Matthew 14 places two stories side by side without telling us how they are connected, but if we assume there is art to his order, we can detect an intriguing contrast. Matthew places stories of King Herod (14:1–12) and King Jesus (14:13–21) side by side, and the contrast lets us know Jesus a little better. Consider:

- Herod throws a drunken party for his friends in the royal palace. Jesus offers a pleasant meal for the crowds in the countryside.
- Herod's party entertains the rich and famous people of Galilean society. Jesus' party feeds the common people, the hungry followers of Jesus.
- The first party was an orgy for leaders. It began with a sensual dance and ended with the death of John. It sought the pleasures and honors of this world. The second party began with teaching and healing. It ended with a meal that was a foretaste of the marriage supper of Jesus and his people.
- King Herod cared for nothing but his glory on his birthday. King Jesus served his people when they forgot their food.

In the spring, near the Passover (John 6:4), Jesus told the hungry people of Israel to recline on the green grass and prepare for a feast. Passover celebrated Israel's redemption from Egypt. After the Passover, Moses gave the people manna in the wilderness. Now Jesus gives his people bread in the wilderness.

Let us pause to collect the main lessons. First, the feeding of the five thousand teaches us to expect the Lord Jesus to provide what his people need. He is compassionate. If we are needy, he supplies. Even if our need rises from our own errors, he is generous. Second, even as Jesus delegated a part of his work to the disciples, so he delegates a portion of his work to us. Even if our resources are small and few, Jesus can multiply them, to this day. Third, when Jesus does provide, we should be thankful, not just for the gift, but for the giver. For the gospel turns our attention not to the bread, but to Jesus who provided it long ago. And he provides today, for life, both physical and eternal.

## Lesson 63 (4-13-25)

### It is I AM (Matthew 14:22-33)

<sup>22</sup> Immediately he made the disciples get into the boat and go before him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowds. <sup>23</sup> And after he had dismissed the crowds, he went up on the mountain by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, <sup>24</sup> but the boat by this time was a long way from the land, beaten by the waves, for the wind was against them. <sup>25</sup> And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. <sup>26</sup> But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, and said, "It is a ghost!" and they cried out in fear. <sup>27</sup> But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid."

<sup>28</sup> And Peter answered him, "Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water." <sup>29</sup> He said, "Come." So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. <sup>30</sup> But when he saw the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink he cried out, "Lord, save me." <sup>31</sup> Jesus immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him, saying to him, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?" <sup>32</sup> And when they got into the boat, the wind ceased. <sup>33</sup> And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God."

- Matthew 14:22-33 ESV

### Summary

Jesus sends His disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee while He goes away to pray. He then comes to them by walking on the surface of the water. For the first time in Matthew's Gospel, the disciples confess Jesus' true identity—which Satan and demons have already acknowledged (Matt 4:3, 6; 8:29). The statement here foreshadows the great confession in 16:16.<sup>1</sup>

### Discussion Questions

After performing the great miracle of multiplying the loaves and fish, Jesus told His men to go to the other side of the lake (14:22). What did He do in the meantime (14:23)?

Why is this significant?

What frightened the disciples, who were seasoned sailors? What did Jesus say to them?

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Mt 14:34–36.

Once Peter realized it was Jesus, what did he request (14:28–31)? What happened?

What significant confession did the disciples make after this event (14:33)? What did they do?

What is *faith*?

What relationship is there between risk-taking and faith?

Spiritually, where is God leading you to step out of your comfort zone and walk in faith with Him?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *Douglas Sean O'Donnell, Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 409–416.*]

HE HEALED ALL THE SICK (4:24). He cleansed a leper (8:1–4). He cured a Roman centurion's servant (8:5–13). He cooled a fever (8:14, 15). He stilled the wind (8:23–27). He exorcised demons (8:28–32). He restored a paralytic (9:1–8). He stopped a desperate woman's twelve-year discharge of blood (9:20–23). He raised a little girl from the dead (9:18, 23–26). He opened the eyes of the blind (9:27–30; cf. 12:22). He made the mute speak (9:32, 33; cf. 12:22). He healed a man with a withered hand *on the Sabbath* (12:9–13). And he took five loaves and two fishes and fed over 5,000 people (14:19)!

These are the miracles of Jesus thus far in Matthew's Gospel. These miracles—by *how* they are done, *when* they are done, *where* they are done, and *to whom* they are done—show us something of the nature of the kingdom. What is the kingdom of heaven like? Look to the parables of Matthew 13, but look also to the miracles of Matthew 4–14. The kingdom of heaven is for rich and poor, religious and non-religious, Jew and Gentile, male and female, adult and child. The kingdom is for all who recognize their spiritual sickness and come to Christ in faith for rest, satisfaction, and the forgiveness of sin.

The miracles teach us about the nature of the kingdom. But they also reveal to us the identity of the King. In the miracles we are to see Jesus as the one prophesied in the Old Testament, the one whose very miracles—the blind receiving their sight, the lame walking, the lepers cleansed, the deaf hearing, and the dead raised to life (11:4, 5)—attest to his identity. This is the promised Christ. And we are to see in these miracles that the one who has authority over every disease and every affliction (4:23, 24; 8:16; 9:35; 14:34–36; 15:29–31) also has authority over our greatest illness (sin) and what sin leads to (death). We are to see that the one who has authority to heal has the authority to forgive sins (9:2, 6) and that such forgiveness ultimately comes on the cross, when “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases” (8:17, quoting Isaiah 53:4). We are to see that this is “Jesus,” the name that means Savior, “for he will save his people from their sins” (1:21).

So in the miracles of our Lord we are to see him as *the Christ* (the Messiah) and as *Jesus* (the Savior). Moreover, we are to see him as God’s Son, “ ‘Immanuel’ (which means, God with us)” (1:23). Jesus Christ is God in the flesh. Now, if you zoned out in the last chapter when I was making this point—the point of the passage—Matthew mercifully follows the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000 with Jesus Christ walking on water, the miracle above all miracles where Jesus *shows* he is God and *says* he is God.

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### : Jesus Is I Am

First, let me show you what he *says*. Whenever I am studying a section of Scripture, I first look for structure. Is there structure to this miracle story? And if so, what is it? Here there certainly is structure. Matthew has divided his retelling of this miracle into two parts or acts. Act 1 is verses 22–27, Act 2 verses 28–33. Act 1 is about Jesus walking on water. Act 2 is about the disciples’ response to Jesus’ walking on water.

Notice that Act 2 ends with the words, “And those in the boat worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God’ ” (v. 33). Worship? That’s a very odd thing for pious Jews to do to another human being. Then, stranger still, these monotheistic Jews call Jesus God’s Son! It’s the first time they say that. God the Father has said it of Jesus in 3:17. The demons have said it of him in 8:29. But now and finally the disciples say it as well. And by their saying it Matthew is saying to us that we should say it as well. So that’s the end of the miracle story and the end of Act 2. We have adoration and confession. Truly this is God’s Son. How does Act 1 end? It ends with Jesus *saying*—perhaps screaming (that’s how I envision it)—these words through the howling wind and rising waves: “Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid” (v. 27).

Here is where the original language and structure is helpful and interesting. In the original language of our text, after Jesus says, “Take heart” (it is one word in Greek and can mean “take heart” or “be of good courage”), he tells the disciples, “Do not be afraid.” Between those words—fear not/fear not—we find the words, *ego eimi*. The esv translates it, “it is I.” But in Greek it is a very straightforward formula that means “I am.” “Don’t fear—I AM is here.” The phrase *ego eimi* is the name God used for himself in the Old Testament, most famously at the burning bush. God tells Moses to tell the Israelites his name. “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I

AM has sent me to you' ” (Exodus 3:14 LXX). Even more interestingly, this divine “self-identification formula” (I AM) is combined in a few places in Isaiah with the phrase, “fear not.”

...Is it merely a coincidence that in the middle of the one miracle that crystallized in the disciples' minds or at least verbalized on the disciples' lips the deity of Jesus we have the words “I am”? I don't think so, and neither do a host of other Bible commentators. For example, one commentator wrote, “The center of the story is Jesus' imperial '*I am.*' The feeder of the hungry in the preceding story is now identified as the divine Lord who walks on water.” Yes, Jesus is “the divine Lord who walks on water.” Jesus says as much, and he shows as much. He *says* his identity (that's the bit about the “I am”), but he also *shows* his identity, obviously by walking on “the water” or “the sea.”

In Scripture “the sea” often represented the forces of evil because it's powerful, uncontrollable, and deadly. You may remember in my chapter on the demonic exorcisms in 8:23–34 how it was significant that Jesus cast the demons out of the men into the pigs (unclean animals according to Old Testament law) and then the pigs fled into “the sea” (the sea representing the evil underworld, all that is unruly in this fallen cosmos). The sea often represented the forces of evil. Thus in Scripture, “the sea” is a power over which only God has power. Think of the crossing and closing of the Red Sea. Think of Jonah—of the storm, the calming of the storm, and that huge sea-creature rescuing the prophet by opening and closing its God-directed mouth.

Jesus walks on the sea! Jesus controls the sea! When we read that we are not only to say, “Wow, what a miracle!” but also, “Wait, only God can control the sea!” As the psalmist says, “O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as you are, O LORD ...? You rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, you still them” (Psalm 89:8, 9; cf. Psalm 65:5–8; 107:23–32). And as Job says of God, “... who commands the sun ... who seals up the stars; who alone stretched out the heavens and trampled [or walked upon] the waves of the sea” (Job 9:7, 8; cf. Job 38:16; Psalm 77:19). Only God controls the sea and walks upon the waves—metaphorically or literally. Jesus controls the sea and walks upon the waves. Therefore, draw this line to that one and that one to this. This is God's Son (v. 33). This is “I am” (v. 27). Jesus *says* he is God incarnate, and Jesus *shows* he is God incarnate.

Think of this miracle afresh. One day Jesus decided not to take a boat to the other side. He wasn't opposed to rowing or sailing a boat. We saw him do that in the last sermon (v. 13). However, this day he decided not to walk to the other side (and the crowd did likewise, see John 6:24, 25). Instead Jesus decided on this particular day (and only this day as far as we know) to walk on water from this side of the sea to the disciples' tossed-about boat *because* he wanted to make something clear before he would journey to Jerusalem to be the Passover sacrifice for our sins. He wanted to make clear to them and to us that it was “Immanuel” on that cross, that God incarnate was the one who took on in his flesh all of our iniquities.

Is that clear? Is it also clear why there is only one right response to this reality? Worship! Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost; as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen and Amen.

## \_\_\_\_\_ : Our Response to I Am

As with the last miracle story, this miracle story is about identity. More specifically, it's about Christology. Jesus Christ's supernatural authority over the sea and his claim while walking upon the sea shows and says to us that he is God's Son, "God with us" in the flesh, and he is thus worthy of our worship. But that's only one side of the story. The other side has to do with discipleship—what it means to follow Jesus. I'm sure (as I hope you're sure) that this passage before us records a real historical event. But I think, as many ancient and modern commentators have thought, that this event functions or can function (is intended to function) like "a little parable" on Christian discipleship. This is what a Christian disciple looks like. With that in mind, before we get to the main lesson, here are two lesser lessons of Christian discipleship.

*Lesser lesson 1:* If you follow Christ's commands, it does not mean you will be spared adversity. Jesus "made the disciples get into the boat" (v. 22). Those disciples started to sail to the other side. Now Jesus knew what was going to happen when they were "a long way from the land" (v. 24)—the middle of the sea ("about three or four miles" out, John 6:19). He knew then that "the wind [would be] against them" (14:24). He knew the storm was coming. Obedience to Jesus' word does not mean no stormy seas ahead. In fact, as we have learned throughout our study of Matthew, quite the opposite is true. If you want to follow Jesus, watch out. Watch out for the temptations and troubles and trials that will arise and crash upon you like waves crashing against a boat in the middle of rough waters.

*Lesser lesson 2:* Nevertheless, Jesus knows the trouble we are in, and he knows how to rescue his disciples from such troubles, and we can count on him to do so. One miracle is Jesus' walking on water; a second miracle is Peter walking on water, but a third miracle (the one most often ignored) is the sea actually settling down once Jesus gets on board. If the sea didn't stop, nobody would be rescued. These men still have to deal with this deadly storm. They are still on that boat in those waters. Jesus' stilling the storm (we are not told how, but I envision a one-word whisper, "Quiet") is an act of divine rescue. So the lesser lesson is this: Jesus will not abandon his own. He comes to save us. He comes to deliver us from evil.

With this in mind, verses 22–33 record a smaller version of the story of our salvation. Jesus is up on a mountain, praying. He is communing with God the Father. Meanwhile, God's people are in need of rescue. So Jesus descends. He comes down from his communion with the Father. He walks straight into the thick of evil, into the darkness ("the fourth watch of the night"—3 a.m. to 6 a.m.). He walks on the sea. Then at dawn while it is still partly dark—like Easter morning (John 20:1)—he rescues those who cry out as Peter did, "Lord, save me" (14:30). That is lesser lesson 2: Jesus knows how to rescue his people.

Those are the two lesser lessons, or potential lessons. I say "potential" only because I'm not absolutely sure it's appropriate to turn this text into a little parable and see certain historical actions as symbolic. But the one lesson I'm certain we should learn from this passage is the lesson of faith. The theme is, what is the nature of Christian discipleship? But under that umbrella is another question: what is the nature of a disciple's faith?



Here is where Peter comes into play. Look with me at verses 28–31. John records Jesus’ walking on water. Mark records Jesus’ walking on water. But only Matthew adds this bit about Peter walking on water and sinking into the water. Why? I think there may be a few reasons for this. One reason might simply be to validate the miracle—the idea being that not only did Jesus have the power to make another person walk on water (J. C. Ryle calls that “a mightier miracle still”), but that Jesus is not a “ghost” as the disciples first thought, if sinking Peter was rescued by Jesus’ physical hand. Another reason might be to flash back to chapter 10 and flash forward to chapter 28, where Jesus shares his power with his church: “All authority ... has been given to me. Go therefore [you—through my presence and my power] and make disciples.”

Peter’s walking on water might be for one of those two reasons. But the final and best reason, I think, is to teach us about the nature of Christian faith. Look again at verses 28–31, and I’ll explain what I mean by the nature of Christian faith. After Jesus said, “Take heart; it is I [*I am*]. Do not be afraid,” we read that Peter answers, “Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water” (v. 28). Jesus said, “ ‘Come.’ So Peter got out of the boat and walked on the water and came to Jesus. But when he saw [the effects of] the wind, he was afraid, and beginning to sink ...” (vv. 28–30a). Peter sinks like a rock. But then he cried out in faith, “Lord, save me” (v. 30b). And Jesus did. He “immediately reached out his hand and took hold of him.” He didn’t next say, “Good try. Way to go. Peter, you’re the first human (besides me) to walk on water.” Rather he said, “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (v. 31).

What do we do with this? What does this teach us about faith? ...Peter is to be scolded, if I can use that hard a word for what Jesus says in verse 31, not for leaving the boat but for not abiding in the faith, for not persevering, for losing his focus. You see, the nature of faith here (with this vivid picture) seems to be not just “I’m a proud, weak, desperate sinner, save me”—that we only need to reach our hand up to Jesus as Savior. Rather the picture here is of walking toward Jesus as Lord. Yes, we need him as Savior (we all come to him with our bodies so to speak beneath the waters), but once we are pulled up out of those waters, we must also walk. We must walk toward him as Lord, trusting in his divine power each step of the way.

What is the nature of Christian faith? Here I think we are taught that faith is *confidence* not in self or self-righteousness but in Christ. We may doubt, but there is no need to doubt. Jesus isn’t high on doubt here, is he? “O you of little faith, why did you doubt?” (v. 31). You see, doubt equals little faith—not no faith, but less faith than you should have. Faith is *confidence* in Christ. Faith is also *courage* through Christ. Faith is courage through or by means of the power of Christ. Jesus said, “[W]hy did you doubt?” (v. 31). Faith is confidence in Christ. But he also said, “Do not be afraid” or “fear not” (v. 27). As doubt is contrary to faith (21:21), so fear is contrary to faith. Do you see that? In verse 26 the disciples are “terrified ... they cried out in fear.” In verse 27 Jesus said, “Do not be afraid.” In verse 30, “when he [Peter] saw the wind, he was afraid, and [guess what happened? He began] to sink.” Fear or faith? Fear that God can’t provide and can’t save is contrary to faith (see especially Habakkuk 3:17–19).

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1), but also I shall not fear. I will not fear famine (you make “me lie down in green pastures,” you lead “me beside still waters”), enemies

(you prepare me “a table ... in the presence of my enemies”), or death (“even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death ... you are with me.... I shall dwell in the house of the LORD forever”). What is the nature of a disciple’s faith? Doubt not; fear not. Confidence in Christ; courage by means of Christ.

Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as “the *conviction* of things not seen.” Hebrews 11:2ff. then illustrates that definition with the heroes of the faith who were all looking forward confidently in faith (see esp. v. 26). Faith is conviction. It’s confidence. And faith is, as Hebrews 12:2 phrases it, “looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.” Looking to Jesus, as Peter was and then wasn’t. Looking to Jesus not once but every step of the way. Considering him (Hebrews 12:3) and walking toward him, with eyes fixed on him, not growing weary no matter how high or heavy the waves of this world crash against us. Doubt not. Fear not. Confidence in Christ; courage by means of Christ—that’s faith.

So yes, faith means assenting to certain truths—“Jesus is the Son of God,” etc. And yes, faith means understanding those truths—“Jesus, fully God, became fully man, so that I (a fully sinful man) might be fully reconciled to God.” Faith means assent and understanding. But faith also means trust—getting out of the boat into the evil waters and walking forward to Jesus, by the power of Jesus, until we get to Jesus. Christology and discipleship—that’s 14:22–33. That’s the miracle of Jesus walking on water. That’s the sum of Christianity (when you think about it) in twelve short verses. Not bad, Matthew. Not bad at all.

## Conclusion

The climax of the chapter occurs in verse 33. Following Jesus’ miracle of walking on the water, the disciples in the boat responded to Jesus by saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.” This is the first time that the disciples addressed Jesus in this way. We’ve seen the Father call Jesus the Son (3:17), and we’ve even seen demons call Jesus the Son of God (8:29), but this is the first time the disciples identify and worship Him in this way. We see once again the relationship between belief and worship: Once you recognize who Jesus is, you realize how He is to be worshiped. The same principle holds true for us as well. As we come to know Jesus through His Word, we too should respond in adoration. Let us fall at the feet of the One who saves the perishing, and feast at the table with the One who satisfies the hungry.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> David Platt, *Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 197.



## Lesson 64 (4-20-25)

### The Parable of Clean and Unclean (Matthew 15:1-20)

Then Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, <sup>2</sup>“Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat.” <sup>3</sup>He answered them, “And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? <sup>4</sup>For God commanded, ‘Honor your father and your mother,’ and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ <sup>5</sup>But you say, ‘If anyone tells his father or his mother, “What you would have gained from me is given to God,” <sup>6</sup>he need not honor his father.’ So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. <sup>7</sup>You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:

- <sup>8</sup> “ ‘This people honors me with their lips,  
but their heart is far from me;  
<sup>9</sup> in vain do they worship me,  
teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’ ”

<sup>10</sup>And he called the people to him and said to them, “Hear and understand: <sup>11</sup>it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person.” <sup>12</sup>Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” <sup>13</sup>He answered, “Every plant that my heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up. <sup>14</sup>Let them alone; they are blind guides. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into a pit.” <sup>15</sup>But Peter said to him, “Explain the parable to us.” <sup>16</sup>And he said, “Are you also still without understanding? <sup>17</sup>Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? <sup>18</sup>But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. <sup>19</sup>For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. <sup>20</sup>These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone.”

- Matthew 15:1-20 ESV

### Summary

In Gennesaret, Pharisees from Jerusalem approach Jesus and accuse Him of being lax toward their legal traditions. Jesus responds by pointing out their inconsistencies and condemns them by quoting the prophet Isaiah. Jesus turns the confrontation with the Pharisees into a teaching opportunity for His disciples. He emphasizes the priority of the heart over external matters, such as handwashing and ritual purity.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Mt 15:10–20.

## Discussion Questions

In Matthew 15:1–9 the Pharisees and teachers of the Law were once again out to catch Jesus and His disciples in an infraction of the Law. Of what was Jesus accused in this passage (15:2)?

How did He reply?

How did the Pharisees react to Jesus' object lesson (15:12)? Do you think Jesus' reply was any less likely to "offend" His critics (15:12–14)? Explain.

Matthew 15:1–20 mentions several "sins" that still exist today. List these types of sins, and describe what you believe should be our attitude toward each one.

What sources of authority and traditions compete with God's Word in the context in which you live?

If not everyone who quotes Scripture speaks the truth, then how can you prepare yourself to discern truth from error?

What contemporary trends are putting pressure on believers to compromise faithfulness to God? How can our response involve courage *and* humility?

In your own words, explain the difference between superficial religion and supernatural regeneration.

Jesus teaches that holiness proceeds from the heart. Practically, then, how do you cultivate such holiness?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *David Platt, Exalting Jesus in Matthew*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David Platt, and Tony Merida, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 199–206.]

It may surprise you to find out that some of the biggest threats to faithful discipleship come from highly esteemed religious traditions. The road we're on may be marked "narrow," but looks can be deceiving. We often fail to identify evil because we associate it with a pitchfork, but Satan is usually more subtle than that. Our adversary disguises himself as an angel of light, Paul tells us (2 Cor 11:14). And while some of our practices and traditions have a "reputation of wisdom," being a scrupulous rule-keeper in religion doesn't necessarily equate with godliness (Col 2:23). If Satan can't trip us up with outright immorality, he is more than happy to use seemingly good things to direct our attention away from Christ and the gospel. The Pharisees in Jesus' day presented just such a danger. They put on a good show, but Jesus' piercing gaze saw right through their flesh-fueled holiness. As we look at Matthew 15, we should be reminded that Jesus sees right through ours as well.

### **Exalt the Authority of God's \_\_\_\_\_ (MATTHEW 15:1–7)**

At this point in Matthew's narrative, a group of Pharisees and scribes came from Jerusalem (v. 1), likely an official contingency. Their goal was to find out what Jesus was teaching and how they could stop Him. They asked Jesus in verse 2 why His disciples broke the traditions of the elders by not washing their hands when they ate. In His response, Jesus teaches us to exalt the authority of God's Word. This is the antidote to accepting man-made authority.

Washing your hands in the context of Jesus' day was not a hygiene issue for the Pharisees, like a mother telling her children to "wash up" before dinner. This was a ritual-cleansing issue established by tradition. The "tradition of the elders" (v. 2) goes all the way back to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, when the book of the law was rediscovered. Scribes began to study it, and teachers began to explore all the ways that the law should be applied to specific situations in people's lives. The end result was something akin to two authorities: (1) the law of God and (2) the teaching of the elders. The teaching of the elders was mainly oral and it was passed down from generation to generation. By AD 200, these traditions were compiled in a book called the Mishnah.

As the scribes and Pharisees added all kinds of rules and regulations to the law, their traditions were eventually seen as authoritative and began to trump the law itself. Some considered it to be worse to disobey the teaching of the elders than it was to disobey the commands of the law. Part of the tradition of the elders dealt with ceremonially washing your hands a certain way before a meal. This background helps us understand Jesus' response. When these religious leaders questioned him about keeping their traditions, He turned the tables on them and asked them why *they* were breaking the commandments of God for the sake of their traditions (v. 3), as if to say, "You're one to talk!"

Jesus illustrates His point in verses 4–6 using the example of God’s command for children to honor their father and mother (Exod 20:12; Deut 5:16). The Pharisees and scribes had come up with traditions that actually allowed children *not* to provide for their parents. If a parent needed something but a child didn’t want to give it, the child could simply claim that what was needed was dedicated to the Lord. This tradition could be used to avoid honoring one’s father and mother. In this and a number of other ways, the elders’ traditions were trumping the Word of God.

### ***Minimize the thoughts of man***

Although most believers today don’t have to address the issue of ritual washings or inheritance laws from the Mishnah, there are still some massively important takeaways for us in this passage. In order to be faithful to God’s Word in our lives and in our preaching and teaching, we must minimize the thoughts of man. Men have no authority to shepherd Christ’s church based on their own teachings. This danger is rampant across the church today, just as it was in Jesus’ day. Consider some of the dangers of falling prey to the doctrines of men.

First, the thoughts and teachings of man are dangerous because **they promote self-centeredness**. We see this with the Pharisees in that children who didn’t want to part with their resources could hold onto them instead of supporting their parents. However, when God’s Word says to do something that is not easy, we shouldn’t look for a way out; we should submit. Rather than being self-centered, disciples of Jesus ought to be God-centered.

Second, the thoughts of man should be avoided because **they fuel self-righteousness**. When we follow man’s way of thinking we stop trusting in God and instead develop a prideful self-righteousness that has no need of Him. We stand on our own soapboxes instead of the timeless truths of Scripture.

A third danger of adopting man’s thoughts is that **they serve self-interest**. Jesus was undercutting the role that the Pharisees and scribes played in Jewish religion. If the Word of God was held supreme, and not the teaching of the elders, then these scribes and Pharisees would be out of a job. Their thoughts fueled their own interests.

If we’re not careful, the dangers of man-made teachings and the scruples of the Pharisees can sound somewhat distant. Their particular practices may not seem relevant today, so we miss the many ways in which the thoughts of man are exalted today. Here are just a few specific examples to watch out for:

**Cultic teachers.** Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons are examples of cults that are alive and well today. These religious groups are not part of biblical Christianity. For example, in addition to the Bible, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (or the Mormon church) has three other books of teachings that it holds to be authoritative alongside the Bible: *Book of Mormon*, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*. Joseph Smith, the founder of this movement,

declared the *Book of Mormon* to be “the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion, and a man would get nearer to God by abiding by its precepts, than by any other book” (as cited in McKeever and Johnson, *Mormonism 101*, 118). Mormons also embrace a number of other errant doctrines. Wayne Grudem claims that they do not hold to “any major Christian doctrines concerning salvation or the person of God or the person and work of Christ” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 865). A number of other groups could be listed that fall into this category: Christian Scientists, International Churches of Christ, Scientologists, Unitarian Universalists, etc. Error has a variety of manifestations.

**Catholic teaching.** The Catholic Church acknowledges three sources of authority: the Bible (including the Apocrypha), tradition, and the Magisterium, or teaching ministry of the church. Bishops, in communion with the pope, interpret the Bible and tradition. All three of these sources are equally authoritative. In fact, the Catechism of the Catholic Church says that they (the three sources of authority) “are so connected and associated that one of them cannot stand without the others.”

**Cultural traditions.** The temptation to elevate man’s thoughts above God’s is not just a problem for established religions. We do things as Christians in the twenty-first century that are nowhere prescribed in the Bible. We only think certain things are biblical because they’re a part of the tradition that’s been passed down to us. This is why we constantly have to look at the authority of God’s Word and ask God to reveal our blind spots. We must be on guard against areas where we have put our thoughts, preferences, and traditions above Scripture.

**Contemporary trends.** The truth of God’s Word is also pushed to the side by the pressure we feel to adopt things and ideas that are new. We are bombarded with new ways to do church and new teachings to trumpet. Unfortunately, many of the conferences, books, and teachings that are spread all across contemporary Christianity virtually ignore what the Word of God says. To be sure, not all trends and traditions are bad; some are quite good and helpful, but only if they promote the authority of God’s Word.

### ***Magnify the truth of God***

As we minimize the thoughts of man, we must at the same time magnify the truth of God. The primary way for pastors and churches to do this is to **let the Word consume our teaching and preaching**. If the pastor stops preaching the Word, the congregation should stop following him as pastor. Authority in the church doesn’t come from any man’s opinions or ideas, but only from Christ, the Head of the church (Col 1:18), who leads us by means of Spirit-inspired Scripture (2 Tim 3:16). This also means that we must **let the Word drive our decisions and practices**. Some of my favorite moments as a pastor happen when the other pastors and I are in a room with the Word before us, praying and seeking the Lord about a certain issue. It’s like seeing the Word come alive, and I’m reminded again that this is how Christ leads His church.



## Promote Authenticity in God's \_\_\_\_\_ (MATTHEW 15:8–9)

Jesus addresses another element of faithful discipleship that is closely tied to exalting the authority of God's Word: we must promote authenticity in God's worship. Jesus quotes from Isaiah where the prophet called out the people of God for worshiping God in vain (Isa 29:13). Their hearts were far from Him, and in part this was fueled by the commandments of men. See, then, how the logic builds from the previous point: as long as the *thoughts of man* are central in the church, the *worship of man* will be central in the church. Alternatively, as long as the *truth of God* is central in the church, the *worship of God* will be central in the church. A Word-saturated church leads to God-glorifying worship.

Though Jesus' comments about worship are brief in this passage, there are a number of important implications. First, **worship is more than physical action**. The scribes and Pharisees were honoring God with their lips but not with their hearts or their lives. This is a danger for us today as well. You can stand, preach, pray, take the Lord's Supper, and any number of other things in worship, yet your heart can still be far from God. We must guard against this tendency in our churches and in our individual lives. One way to guard against false worship is not to be overly **concerned with form**, that is, what we do physically. This kind of preoccupation bypasses the heart. More important than what we do outwardly in worship is who we are; the heart is the real issue.

Second, as we think about authentic worship, we need to remember that **worship is all about spiritual affection**. It's about our hearts lifted high to God. Though some may go to unhealthy excesses, worship involves emotion and affection for God. This comes out in a number of ways: brokenness and contrition over sin, grief over our circumstances, fear and awe before God's greatness, gratitude for His grace, hope in His promises, and celebration of His salvation. All of these responses to God represent true worship. Isaiah 66:2 says, "I will look favorably on this kind of person: one who is humble, submissive in spirit, and trembles at My word." That is genuine spiritual affection.

Our spiritual affection is not simply about raw emotions but is **compelled by faith**. That is, our response toward God, including our emotions, ought to be quickened by our trust in Him. J. C. Ryle said, "Let it be a settled resolution with us that in all our religion the state of our hearts shall be the main thing. Let it not content us to go to church and observe the forms of religion. Let us look far deeper than this and desire to have a heart right in the sight of the Lord." (Ryle, *Matthew*, 129) Authentic worship and true spiritual affection come about as our hearts honestly listen to and engage our great God.

## Cultivate Hearts of \_\_\_\_\_ (MATTHEW 15:10–20)

A third admonition comes in verse 11: "It's not what goes into the mouth that defiles a man, but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man." Though the disciples were stunned by what Jesus was saying, Jesus Himself was under no illusions that His message would be well

received. He was throwing down the gauntlet with the scribes and Pharisees, men whom these disciples revered. Jesus was totally transforming their thinking.

**The truth** that Jesus goes on to communicate in verses 13–20 is foundational for how we ought to think about holiness. **Our greatest need is not cleaner hands**, that is, for physical cleansing. What goes into the body eventually comes out of the body, Jesus very candidly points out (v. 17). Therefore, dirty hands are not the real spiritual danger. These scribes and Pharisees were so focused on the externals that they had completely bypassed the internal. They needed to see that **our greatest need is changed hearts**. This is why Jesus said speech, which comes out of the mouth, defiles a person, for it proceeds from the heart. Jesus lists all kinds of sins in verse 19—murder, adultery, sexual immorality, stealing, lying, slandering—and all these are issues of the heart. Man’s greatest need, then, is not to try to clean his hands or fix his life on the outside; man’s greatest need is a changed heart on the inside. Holiness begins in the heart, and only Jesus can produce this kind of change.

Consider how heart change is actually brought about in our lives. It begins as **Jesus forgives us of all our sin**. The prophet Ezekiel had spoken of a day when God would cleanse the hearts of His people (Ezek 36:25), and this happened as a result of Christ’s sin-bearing death. In connection with this forgiveness, heart change also happens as **Jesus fills us with His Holy Spirit**. Ezekiel’s prophecy of a new covenant included the following promise from God: “I will place My Spirit within you” (Ezek 36:27). Only the Holy Spirit can change us from the inside out. This is the only way we can obey the exhortation in 2 Corinthians 6:17 (quoting Isa 52:11) to “come out from among them and be separate.” We cannot be casual about holiness, but rather we must by the power of the Holy Spirit pursue purity. We must be holy as God is holy (1 Pet 1:16; Lev 11:44) by cultivating our hearts. Once again, J. C. Ryle’s comments are helpful here:

What is the first thing we need in order to be Christians? A new heart. What is the sacrifice God asks us to bring to him? A broken and a contrite heart (Psalm 51:17). What is the true circumcision? The circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:29). What is genuine obedience? To obey from the heart. What is saving faith? To believe with the heart. Where ought Christ to dwell? To dwell in our hearts through faith (Ephesians 3:17). (Ryle, *Matthew*, 126) Everything revolves around the heart.

If our need is to cultivate holy hearts that have been changed by God’s Holy Spirit, then **the implication** for our witness in the world is clear. **What the world doesn’t need is the spread of superficial religion**, which is precisely what many false teachers offer. A lost world doesn’t need more people monotonously carrying out religious rules and regulations under the banner of Christianity. The Pharisees may have been well respected, but Jesus told His disciples that **false teachers are destined for judgment**. They weren’t planted by God (v. 13), which implies that they were planted by the evil one. However, they would be uprooted in due time. In addition to facing judgment themselves, **false teachers are dangerous to others**. They are the blind leading the blind, bringing their own followers into a pit with them (v. 14). This is why the church must guard against false teachings.

## **Conclusion**

Don't think that you are immune to the attacks of the evil one, particularly his attacks through wolves in sheep's clothing (Matt 7:15). The world doesn't need the spread of superficial religion, but **what the world does need is the spread of supernatural regeneration**. We must never be satisfied with superficial holiness. Instead, we want hearts that produce holy lives, and this is the work of God.

## Lesson 65 (4-27-25)

### The Two Resurrections (John 5:25-29)

<sup>25</sup> “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. <sup>26</sup> For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. <sup>27</sup> And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice <sup>29</sup> and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

- John 5:25-29 ESV

### Summary

Jesus attributed to himself activities previously ascribed only to God: the giving of life and final judgment. Jesus has authority to give spiritual life and judgment in the present (“now,” v. 25). Those who hear his words and believe in him have eternal life as a present reality and will not come into future judgment. The Father has given the Son the authority to give life and execute judgment because he—the Son—is the Son of Man. Jesus delineated the same two divine prerogatives as those laid out in verses 24–27, except now they will be executed in the future at the general resurrection of the dead. Jesus’ opponents would have been shocked when he told them that he would call forth the dead at the final resurrection. So while verses 24–25 refer to a spiritual resurrection from spiritual death in the present life, verses 28–30 speak of a future bodily resurrection from the dead. Jesus concluded his comments by again stating his dependence on his Father.<sup>1</sup>

### Discussion Questions

What does Jesus mean when He says, “an hour is coming, and is now here” in verse 25?

According to verse 26, where does the Son get His authority to give life?

What role does Jesus say He has been given in judgment (verse 27)?

What contrast is made between those who have done good and those who have done evil in verse 29?

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<sup>1</sup> William F. Cook III, “John,” in *The NIV Grace and Truth Study Bible*, ed. R. Albert Mohler Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 1452.

What does it mean that the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and live? Is this referring to physical or spiritual death?

Why is Jesus' authority to judge connected to Him being the Son of Man?

How does this passage relate to the idea of resurrection and eternal life in the Bible?

What does this passage teach about the relationship between faith and works in judgment (verse 29)?

In what ways have you experienced Jesus' life-giving power in your own spiritual journey?

How should this passage shape our urgency in sharing the gospel with others?

What are some practical ways to live in anticipation of the resurrection to life rather than the resurrection to judgment?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *John F. MacArthur Jr., John 1–11, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), 193–202.*]

To the age-old question, "If a man dies, will he live again?" (Job 14:14), the Bible answers emphatically, "Yes." All people, both believers and unbelievers, will one day be raised from the dead. Everyone will live forever, consciously and individually. For the believer, there are two aspects to that resurrection—spiritual and physical. Spiritually, Christians are resurrected when God imparts salvation to their previously dead souls. Although they were dead in their sins (Eph. 2:1), they now enjoy new life in Christ (v. 5; cf. Rom. 6:4).

Physically, believers are confident that, even though their earthly bodies will eventually wear out, they will one day receive resurrection bodies that will endure forever. They will be given these new bodies when "the Lord Jesus Christ ... will transform the body of [their] humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to

subject all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:20–21)...The Bible teaches that unbelievers will also experience a physical resurrection. But, because they never experienced spiritual resurrection, they will be raised to face final sentencing before the Great White Throne. In keeping with their condemnation, their eternal resurrection bodies will be suited for their eternal punishment in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:11–15).

The truth of resurrection is repeated throughout the Scriptures, beginning in the book of Genesis...Building on the foundation of the Old Testament, the New Testament gives further insight into the truth of literal, bodily resurrection. In Luke 14:14 the Lord spoke of “the resurrection of the righteous,” while in John 6:39 He declared, “This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day” (cf. vv. 40, 44, 54). Before raising Lazarus from the dead, Jesus proclaimed, “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies” (11:25). The apostles also preached the resurrection...The epistles continue to expand the biblical teaching regarding the resurrection of the body...The apostle John also had the future resurrection of believers in mind when he wrote, “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is” (1 John 3:2).

In the previous section (vv. 17–24), Jesus startled and outraged His opponents by claiming to be God, and thus exempt from their man-made Sabbath restrictions. His claim, in large part, was built on two key realities: that He had the authority to give life, and that He had the authority to judge (vv. 21–22). In verse 24, He showed how those divine prerogatives affect sinners: those who believe in Him receive eternal life, while those who reject Him will be judged. Verses 25–29 further illustrate those truths, presenting both the spiritual resurrection of believers and the physical resurrection that awaits everyone.

### **SPIRITUAL RESURRECTION (5:25–26)**

The discussions of both the spiritual and physical resurrections may be divided into three subpoints:

#### **THE \_\_\_\_\_ (5:25)**

The solemn phrase *amēn, amēn* (**truly, truly**) introduces an emphatic, unarguable declaration by Jesus. He began with the seemingly paradoxical statement **an hour is coming and now is**. The **hour** of the believers’ resurrection **now is** in the sense that when they “were dead in [their] trespasses and sins ... [God] made [them] alive together with Christ, ... and raised [them] up with Him” (Eph. 2:1, 5–6; cf. Col. 2:13). Yet the **hour** is still **coming** in the sense that the resurrection of their physical bodies is yet future (1 Cor. 15:35–54; Phil. 3:20–21).

The already/not yet sense of the phrase may also be understood in another way. While Christ was present, He offered spiritual life to all who would heed His words (6:37; Matt. 7:24–27; cf. John 14:6). Yet the full expression of the new era He inaugurated would not come until the day

of Pentecost (14:17). Both during Christ's earthly ministry (e.g., 4:39–42, 53), and in the fullness of the Spirit's ministry after Pentecost, **the spiritually dead** who responded to **the voice of the Son of God** would **live** in the Spirit (cf. Rom. 8:1–11).

The New Testament frequently describes unbelievers as those who are spiritually **dead**. Paul charged the Romans to “present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead” (Rom. 6:13). He reminded the Ephesians that in their unregenerate state they were “dead in [their] trespasses and sins” (Eph. 2:1, 5; cf. Matt. 8:22). Later in that epistle the apostle expressed the gospel invitation, “For this reason it says, ‘Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’ ” (Eph. 5:14). To the Colossians he wrote, “When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions” (Col. 2:13). The apostle John also described salvation as having “passed out of death into life” (1 John 3:14).

To be spiritually dead is to be insensible to the things of God and totally unable to respond to Him (cf. 1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:3–4). Paul vividly described it as walking “according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience ... [living] in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and [being] by nature children of wrath” (Eph. 2:2–3).

Spiritual death, according to the nineteenth-century Scottish commentator John Eadie, “implies insensibility. The dead, which are as insusceptible as their kindred clay, can be neither wooed nor won back to existence. The beauties of holiness do not attract man in his spiritual insensibility, nor do the miseries of hell deter him. God's love, Christ's sufferings, earnest conjurations by all that is tender and by all that is terrible, do not affect him.... It implies inability. The corpse cannot raise itself from the tomb and come back to the scenes and society of the living world.... Inability characterizes fallen man.” (*A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians* [Reprint; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979], 120–21) That Christ came to give eternal life to the spiritually dead is a central theme in John's gospel (1:4; 3:15–16, 36; 4:14; 5:39–40; 6:27, 33, 35, 40, 47–48, 51, 54; 8:12; 10:10, 28; 11:25; 14:6; 17:2–3; 20:31).

## **THE \_\_\_\_\_ (5:26)**

The Son can give life (v. 21) because, like the **Father**, He **has life in Himself**. No one can give to others what he himself lacks; thus no sinful human being can generate for himself eternal life, nor impart it to anyone else. God alone possesses it, and He grants it through His Son to whomever He wills. Those who deny the deity of Christ twist Jesus' statement that the Father **gave** life to the Son into an admission of His own creatureliness and inferiority to the Father. Such is not the case, however. John had already stated in the prologue to his gospel that the Son possessed life in Himself from all eternity (1:4). Again, it must be affirmed that when He became a man, our Lord voluntarily gave up the independent use of His divine attributes (Phil. 2:6–7; cf. John 5:19, 30; 8:28). But the Father granted Him the authority to give life (both physical and spiritual) even during the self-limiting condescension of His earthly ministry.

## THE \_\_\_\_\_ (5:25b)

Those who experience spiritual resurrection will receive abundant (10:10), everlasting life. The Lord was not, of course, teaching that everyone who listens to a gospel presentation will be saved (cf. Rom. 10:9–10). It is only **those who hear** in the sense of true faith and obedience to the gospel who **will live**. In other words, those who have savingly heard will respond in repentance and belief. “My sheep hear My voice,” Jesus declared, “and I know them, and they follow Me” (10:27). To Pilate He affirmed, “Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (18:37). In the Lord’s letter to the churches in Revelation, each ends with the exhortation, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). That statement identifies believers as those who have both the spiritual faculty and duty to respond to divine revelation. In contrast, the lost do not savingly hear Christ’s voice; they do not understand or obey it (8:43, 47; 12:47; 14:24), and hence will not live spiritually.

## THE PHYSICAL RESURRECTION (5:27–29)

As with the authority to give life, the Father also **gave** the incarnate and submissive Son the **authority to execute judgment**. Christ received that authority **because He is the Son of Man**. As God in human flesh, a man “who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin” (Heb. 4:15), Jesus is uniquely qualified to be mankind’s judge. The phrase **Son of Man**, Jesus’ favorite designation of Himself, derives from Daniel’s messianic description of the Son of Man as the one who “was given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and men of every language might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away; and His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:14). Since He is the God-man who entered fully into human life, experience, and temptation (Heb. 2:14–18; 4:14–16), Jesus can be the ultimate judge of all mankind.

## THE PERSONS (5:28a)

The unbelieving Jews were astonished and outraged at Jesus’ bold claim to be the giver of spiritual life and the ultimate judge of all men. But the Lord was about to make another shocking claim. Rebuking them for their unbelief—that they would **marvel at** His teachings—Jesus continued by revealing another truth that astounded them: that He would one day raise the dead from their graves. As He did with the spiritual resurrection (v. 25), Jesus said that the **hour** of bodily resurrection is **coming**. But unlike the spiritual resurrection, He did not say that there is a present aspect of that reality. The resurrection of **all who are in the tombs** is still future. At that time, the souls of the righteous dead, now in heaven with the Lord (2 Cor. 5:6–8), and of the wicked dead, now in torment in Hades (Luke 16:22–23), will be given resurrected bodies fit for eternity...

## THE POWER (5:28b–29a)

Jesus did not delineate the order of the resurrection in this passage because He was not concerned here with chronology, but with revealing His divine power. This time the phrase **hear**



**His voice** does not describe the effectual hearing of faith as in verse 25, but refers to the sovereign command of Christ. At His charge, the bodies of everyone who ever lived will come back to life. It is no wonder, then, that the apostle Paul longed to “know Him and the power of His resurrection” (Phil. 3:10).

### **THE PURPOSE (5:29b)**

The final resurrection will usher believers into the glories and joys of eternal **life**, and bring unbelievers to the endless suffering of eternal **judgment**. By characterizing believers as **those who did the good deeds** and unbelievers as **those who committed the evil deeds** Jesus was not teaching that salvation is by works. Throughout His ministry, Jesus clearly taught that salvation “is the work of God, that [people] believe in Him whom He has sent” (6:29; cf. Isa. 64:6; Rom. 4:2–4; 9:11; Gal. 2:16; Eph. 2:8–9; 2 Tim. 1:9; Titus 3:5). Good works are simply the evidence of salvation; Jesus called them “fruit” in Luke 6:43–45. Those who believe in the Son will as a result do **good deeds** (3:21; Eph. 2:10; James 2:14–20), while those who reject the Son will be characterized by **evil deeds** (3:18–19).

While works do not save, they do provide the basis for divine judgment. Scripture teaches that God judges people based on their deeds (Ps. 62:12; Isa. 3:10–11; Jer. 17:10; 32:19; Matt. 16:27; Gal. 6:7–9; Rev. 20:12; 22:12), because those deeds manifest the condition of the heart. Thus Jesus said, “The mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart” (Matt. 12:34). Later in Matthew’s gospel He taught that “the things that proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and those defile the man. For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders” (15:18–19). In Luke 6:45 Jesus told His hearers, “The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good; and the evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth what is evil.” The apostle Paul also taught that people’s actions reflect their inner nature. To the Romans he wrote,

*[God] will render to each person according to his deeds: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek, but glory and honor and peace to everyone who does good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. (Rom. 2:6–10)*

A few chapters later, Paul made it clear that those who attain to the resurrection of the righteous do not do so by their own merits, but by means of their union with Jesus Christ through faith:

*Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection. (Rom. 6:3–5)*

Thus good deeds reveal the presence or absence of salvation, but do not produce it. They are its effect, not its cause.

## **Conclusion**

The importance of the doctrine of the resurrection cannot be overstated: without it, there is no Christian faith. Writing to the Corinthians, who were wavering on the doctrine of the resurrection, Paul made it clear that *if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.* (1 Cor. 15:16–19)

The apostle's great hope, as it is of all believers, was to "attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:11), a reference to the resurrection of the righteous. He understood the truth that "blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6). And he knew that such a resurrection was attainable only through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 6:4–5). Concluding his magnificent chapter on the resurrection, Paul wrote, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58). The doctrine of the resurrection provides hope for the future that energizes the Christian's life and service to God in the present.



## Lesson 66 (5-4-25)

### Feeding the “Dogs” (Matthew 15:21-39)

<sup>21</sup> And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.” <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, “Send her away, for she is crying out after us.” <sup>24</sup> He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” <sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” <sup>26</sup> And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” <sup>27</sup> She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” And her daughter was healed instantly.

<sup>29</sup> Jesus went on from there and walked beside the Sea of Galilee. And he went up on the mountain and sat down there. <sup>30</sup> And great crowds came to him, bringing with them the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute, and many others, and they put them at his feet, and he healed them, <sup>31</sup> so that the crowd wondered, when they saw the mute speaking, the crippled healthy, the lame walking, and the blind seeing. And they glorified the God of Israel.

<sup>32</sup> Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.” <sup>33</sup> And the disciples said to him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?” <sup>34</sup> And Jesus said to them, “How many loaves do you have?” They said, “Seven, and a few small fish.” <sup>35</sup> And directing the crowd to sit down on the ground, <sup>36</sup> he took the seven loaves and the fish, and having given thanks he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds. <sup>37</sup> And they all ate and were satisfied. And they took up seven baskets full of the broken pieces left over. <sup>38</sup> Those who ate were four thousand men, besides women and children. <sup>39</sup> And after sending away the crowds, he got into the boat and went to the region of Magadan.

- Matthew 15:21-39 ESV

### Summary

Jesus seizes this opportunity to instruct His disciples about the value of faith and their Gentile (non-Jewish) neighbors. Jesus leaves Tyre and Sidon and returns to Galilee. The summary statement of His healing ministry (v. 30) is reminiscent of 4:23–25; 9:35–36; 14:34–35.

Wherever Jesus went, He brought physical and spiritual restoration. Verses 32-39 present the second mass feeding in Matthew’s Gospel. This account, coupled with vv. 29–31, mirrors

14:13–21. Matthew does not provide a location, but the parallel account in Mark 8:1–10 appears to be set in the Decapolis, a Gentile (non-Jewish) region (Mark 7:31).<sup>1</sup>

### **Discussion Questions**

Matthew 15:21–28 tells the story of Jesus' encounter with a Canaanite woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon. What was her problem? How did the disciples react to her?

How did Jesus initially react? What is Jesus' basis for His initial reaction?

What was responsible for Jesus' change in attitude (15:27–28)?

How does the Canaanite woman demonstrate her persistence?

What does this episode add to the discussion in this chapter of the themes of clean and unclean, pure and unpure?

How can this incident give us confidence in approaching the Father in prayer?

Matthew includes a second story about Jesus feeding thousands of people in the wilderness (vv. 29–39) quite soon after a very similar story in chapter 14. How is this event similar to, and different from, the feeding of the five thousand in Matthew 14:13–22?

How does Jesus' interaction with this Canaanite woman and His feeding of the Gentile crowd help forecast the Great Commission in Matthew 28:18–20?

Like this Gentile Canaanite woman, what unlikely converts has God placed around you?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

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<sup>1</sup> John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Mt 15:32–39.

**Lesson Outline** [This lesson was adapted from *Douglas Sean O'Donnell, Matthew: All Authority in Heaven and on Earth*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 427–435.]

WHEN GOD WANTS TO EXPRESS his love for his people, he often does so with food. Eden was filled with fruit; the promised land with milk and honey; the wilderness with quail and manna; the Feast of Booths with its food, drink, oils, etc.; and the Lord's Supper with bread and wine, and at the end of all history there will be the feast of all feasts—the wedding supper of the Lamb. “Blessed are those who are invited” (Revelation 19:9).

In Jesus' day, God's people longed for this messianic banquet. They knew, believed, and trusted that when Messiah comes, God's people would sit at table with him and feast. Our text is but a foretaste of that. When we read these two stories placed side by side in Matthew's Gospel, we are to say, “Here is the Messiah, the Master of God's house and God's people, the one who has set a table in the wilderness, a table filled with food so abundant that there are leftovers and crumbs scattered everywhere—enough food to feed the world, enough food to feed all who have faith in Jesus.” Look with me now at 15:21–39. I divide this text not by the two stories but by the two themes, themes that we'll get at by asking and answering two questions. The first question is, who's invited to the master's table? The second question is, how does one get into the banquet?

### **Who's Invited to the Master's Table?**

The answer to the first question—who is invited to the master's table?—is, \_\_\_\_\_! It's an open invitation. Matthew's Gospel, which is rightly understood as being the most Jewish of the Gospels, is arguably the most Gentile as well. Think of Matthew's genealogy, which includes Gentiles. Think of the visit of the magi. Think of the healing of the Roman centurion's slave. Think of another Roman centurion's confession at the foot of the cross. Think of the Great Commission. Think of Jesus' words in 8:11, “I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew's Gospel says the door to the kingdom of heaven is open to all—to the Jew first (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), *but also to the Gentile* (Romans 1:16).

What we have seen throughout Matthew is how those with gold star invitations—the Jewish religious and political leaders—have come up with one excuse after another why they can't make the party. However, here in our text we find people from the highways and byways—the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind (v. 30), the demon-possessed (v. 22)—willing to dine in the desert, willing to eat even the crumbs that fall from the master's table (see v. 27; cf. Luke 14:12–24). The house of David will be filled by the Son of David. That is, our Lord Jesus will fill his messianic banquet table with all who are willing to come to him for sustenance. What he said in John 6:37b (“whoever comes to me I will never cast out”), here he acts out. “Whoever”

denotes an open invitation—male/female, master/slave, Jew and even Gentile (cf. Galatians 3:28). Gentiles? Yes, even Gentiles.

In case this *Gentile inclusion idea* isn't plain to you, let me show you it to you in the verses before us. First, we have verse 21: "And Jesus went away from there [Gennesaret] and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon." Why would Jesus walk from Gennesaret to Tyre and then from Tyre up to Sidon? It is thirty-five miles from Gennesaret to Tyre and twenty-five miles from Tyre to Sidon. That's a long way to walk. Why walk? And why walk *there*?

The distance is not as shocking as the destination itself. Tyre and Sidon? That's Gentile territory. What's Jesus doing out there and up there? Why is Jesus leaving the promised land for "paganland"? What is the Son of Abraham/the Son of David (the Jewish Messiah) doing there? Craig Blomberg summarizes the move perfectly: "Jesus has obviously withdrawn from Israel ideologically in vv. 1–20; now he ... withdraws geographically." I'll take Blomberg's thought a step further. Jesus is on a short-term missions trip. He is *showing* the Great Commission before he *commands* it.

So that's verse 21—Jesus' journey to Gentileville. Then look at verse 22, and note who Jesus meets there. Why, it's a Gentile! "And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out ..." Not a "Syrophenician" woman, as Mark would call her in his version of the story (Mark 7:26) and as she would have been called in Jesus' day, but "a Canaanite woman" is how Matthew puts it, an Old Testament way of describing her race and religion. And, my well-read Old Testament readers, what does the word "Canaanite" conjure up in your minds? They're the bad guys. These guys and gals are Israel's enemies!

There are the Egyptians, the Babylonians, the Canaanites—all Israel's archenemies. But here is Jesus (who came out of Egypt) bringing (so it seems) even Israel's enemies out of exile. Yes, Jesus is extending grace to a Canaanite woman. Both descriptions are striking. This is a Canaanite. That's pretty bad. Stay away from her, Jesus. Ah, but she's a woman too. Jewish men were not to associate with women, any woman who was not their wife or mother. And Jewish rabbis were never to associate with Gentile sinners. Remember how flabbergasted the disciples were when Jesus talked with the woman at the well, a Samaritan woman (John 4). Well, this is a *Canaanite* woman! Tattoo "Gentile sinner" across her forehead.

So in 15:21, 22 we see where Jesus is (Gentileville) and who he is talking to (a Gentile) and who he will minister to (Gentiles). In the following verses we will see three other, less subtle details that show Jesus is extending grace to Gentiles. First, we have the reference to "dogs" in verses 26, 27. I will say more about their dog dialogue in a moment. For now we have the following scenario: the woman begs Jesus for help. She begs again. And then Jesus replies with his "dog" comment: "It is not right to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (v. 26). What is he talking about? Well, she knows what he's talking about. Here "the children" (the children of God) symbolizes "Israel" and the "dogs" the Gentiles. Just as someone might call my Irish father a paddy (in fact his name is Patrick or Padraic in Gaelic), and someone might (even still today)

call those big police vans paddy wagons (for those troublesome Irishmen), so the Jews of Jesus' day, as a ethnic/racial slur, called Gentiles "dogs."

So Jesus is dealing with a Gentile "dog." But interestingly here he doesn't use the common slur word "dog," referring to those "wild, homeless scavenger" dogs one would have found on the streets of Palestine. Instead he uses the word for "house dog." Well, you might say, "Big deal. That's not much better. Messiah or no Messiah, he shouldn't go around calling women 'dogs' or any other animal. Most women don't appreciate that." But he is not name-calling. And she gets that. She gets the reference to her. And she gets his point. It's a loaded theological point. She'll stick around, as we'll revisit their dialogue in a few pages, to debate him about it.

For now, however, the point I want us to see (as we are answering the question, who's invited?) is Jesus' willingness to let the dogs into the house. He is willing to call Gentiles "house dogs." He is willing to let these dogs eat from the messianic table in the house of David. He is willing to let Jews and Gentiles live and dine under the same roof. All this is quite revolutionary, and she knows it. So when Jesus opens that door just a crack, she pushes her way in. She will beg like a dog and even eat like a dog. But the Master of the house, by the end of the story, is very willing to accept her—a Canaanite woman!—as a daughter of Abraham, as a "child" of God. What is taught in Galatians 3:26–29 is illustrated here, or better, acted out here: For in Christ Jesus you are all sons [children] of God, through faith.... There is neither Jew nor Greek ... no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring [his children], heirs according to promise. Who's invited to the table? Everyone is; both Jew and Gentile.

### **More Food for More "Dogs"**

Let's review. Jesus is in Tyre and Sidon (Gentile cities), and he encounters and accepts a Gentile woman. When our Lord leaves this region, he returns to somewhere (v. 29) "beside the Sea of Galilee," somewhere where he would feed 4,000 people. Now, who were these people? Jews or Gentiles or some mix of both? I think they were mostly Gentiles. I say this for three reasons.

First, I say this because in Mark's version of the story he tells us where the feeding of the 4,000 took place—"the region of the Decapolis" (Mark 7:31); that is, ten cities that were known for being inhabited by mostly Gentiles. Second, I say this because of how these people responded to the healings. At the end of verse 31 we read, "And they glorified the God of Israel." "God of Israel" is a unique response in the Gospels. It is used in Isaiah 45:15 in the context of the one, true God's dealing with the nations. So maybe their reply is what a Gentile would say. Not just, "And they glorified God," but "And they glorified the God of Israel." A final possible reason those fed were mostly Gentiles has to do with numerology. Yes, numerology!

Since the fourth century, if not earlier, Christian commentators have understood the feeding of the 5,000 to symbolize "Jesus' provision for the Jews" and the feeding of the 4,000 as his "provision for the Gentiles." So, what I'm suggesting here isn't something novel. In fact, some of the earliest Christian commentators, the majority of whom were Gentiles, were so deeply



moved by this glorious illustration of Jesus' inclusion of the Gentiles that they perceived the particular numbers used in this text (numbers like "seven" and "four thousand") to symbolize certain theological truths...I think Matthew was saying when the 5,000 Jews were fed and there were twelve baskets left, it was emblematic of God's full provision for the twelve tribes of Israel. And when the 4,000 Gentiles were fed and there were seven large baskets of leftovers, it symbolized the completion and fullness of Christ's mission, the overabundance of God's love and mercy in the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ that extends still today throughout the world to every tongue and tribe and nation.

### **How Does One Get into the Banquet?**

In this sermon we are answering two questions from this text. First: who's invited to the master's table? Answer: everyone—Jews and Gentiles. The second question is: how does one get into this banquet? What's the ticket to the table? Answer: faith in \_\_\_\_\_

I have argued previously that the melodic line of Matthew's Gospel is found in the Great Commission and can be summarized as follows: All authority -> All nations -> All allegiance. Here we see (as we do in nearly every passage) *all authority*. Again Jesus shows his amazing authority. Look at these miracles—a demon-possessed daughter instantly healed when Jesus says so (v. 28), another long list of healings (v. 30), and then the second grand multiplication of loaves and fish (vv. 36, 37). Jesus shows his authority. Also, we find here *all nations*. That's what the first half of this chapter was all about. The gospel of the kingdom is for Jews and Gentiles. It's a universal, global, transcultural, not-of-this-world-but-for-this-world message. All authority, all nations, and *all allegiance*. In other words, the crucial point is faith in Jesus as King/the one in charge/the one from whom you beg, submit to, and even worship as Lord.

So, who's invited? Everyone. The gospel is inclusive. But how does one get in? Well, one must be properly dressed for such an important occasion. A bride doesn't wear a mechanic's jumpsuit to her wedding; a groom doesn't wear orange corduroy shorts. One must be properly dressed, dressed in the righteousness of Christ through faith in him. So how does one get in? Faith alone in Christ alone—*sola fide; sola Christus*. That's not only a Protestant Reformation slogan—it's illustrated right here in our Bibles! The gospel is inclusive and yet exclusive. The gospel is beautifully (necessarily) inclusively exclusive. One must come through the gate that God has provided—Jesus alone—and one must unlock that gate with the just the right key—faith alone. As even Alexander Sand, a distinguished Roman Catholic Bible scholar, writes of verses 21–28: "The theme of this whole story is this—it is not belonging to Israel that guarantees salvation, 'but faith alone' (*sondern allein der Glaube*)."

Now you might say, "Okay. Faith alone in Christ alone. But what does such faith look like?" Verses 21–28—that's what it looks like. I don't know about you, but I'm glad that the Bible rarely defines theological terms. To my knowledge there is no definition of the Trinity, only the workings of the Trinity, and only one definition of faith (Hebrews 11:1), but hundreds of

examples of it. The Bible is not like a doctoral dissertation: “Let’s start by defining our terms.” Rather it is like a motion picture: “Let me show you how it looks.”

And what does faith look like? Look at Abraham. Look at Job. Look at Habakkuk—“the righteous shall live by his faith.” And in Matthew’s Gospel at whom are we to look? The scribes and Pharisees? Oh, no. They have no faith. How about the disciples? Well, they do have faith, “little faith” (14:31; 16:8; cf. 6:30; 17:20). Look at 15:33. Look at what they ask. After seeing Jesus walk on water, raise the dead, multiply the loaves and fishes, they said to him, “Where are we to get enough bread in such a desolate place to feed so great a crowd?” Little faith.

So, the scribes and Pharisees—no faith; the disciples—little faith. Who then is left? All who are left are a bunch of Gentiles who have great faith—the magi, that Roman centurion, and this Canaanite woman. Look at verse 28. Underline it in your heart. “Then Jesus answered her, ‘O woman, great is your faith!’ ” In Greek the word for “great” is *megalē* (mega, as in Mega Mart or mega-drive or mega-millions). Disciples—little faith; Canaanite—big faith. Mega. Great. Here “Jesus marvels at her faith and gives her his Great Faith Oscar.” What’s so great about her great faith? Here’s what’s so great—person and persistence. Those are the two essential aspects of her faith, two aspects that we should check ourselves on, to see where we fall on the spiritual spectrum—no faith, little faith, or great faith.

First, her faith acknowledges certain truths about the *person* of Jesus. You see, faith is not merely intellectual assent (James tells us as much—even the demons acknowledge who Jesus is, James 2:19), but it is not less than that. Look at what she says about Jesus to Jesus. Three times she calls him “Lord.” Jesus is called “Lord” some twenty times in Matthew’s Gospel, and such a term all but once or twice is used in faith. When the disciples stop believing, the title “Lord” ceases to come from their lips. For example, you won’t find the word “Lord” on their lips in verses 32–34. Yet three times (vv. 22, 25, 27) she calls Jesus “Lord.”

That’s not all. Look also at verse 22. She says, “Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David.” Wow. Not just “Lord” but “Son of David.” Matthew’s Gospel begins, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David” (1:1). Then in 12:23 the crowd, after witnessing Jesus’ power, says, “Can this be the Son of David?” Now finally in 15:22 we hear in effect, “Oh, let me answer that question: Yes, He is the Son of David”—that is, Jesus is the Messiah or the Christ (cf. 22:42). That’s what she (of all people) believes. That’s what she publicly confesses! She’s the opening band for Peter’s great rock show in chapter 16!

God’s covenant with Abraham promised blessing to all the nations. God’s covenant with David promised an everlasting king and kingdom. Jesus is the fulfillment of those two covenants. And (here’s the kicker) this Canaanite woman gets it. She (of all people) believes. In the language of 2 Corinthians 1:20, she believes that “all of the promises of God find their Yes in him [Jesus].” The promise to Abraham? Yes! The promise to David? Yes! The Old Testament teaches that when the Christ comes he will bring blessing to the nations. But this blessing won’t come (and this is what Jesus is getting at in vv. 23–26) until after his death and resurrection. Good Friday comes before the Great Commission. So he says to her, “Woman, you’ll have to wait.” But she

says, “Oh no, Jesus, feed me now. Jew or not, my daughter needs healing.” She is insisting on Easter. That’s how N. T. Wright writes about it. And he’s right! So Jesus says, “Okay. But listen—I can only give scraps now.” And she says, “Scraps? I’ll take ‘em.” Scraps? Some scraps! The child is “healed instantly” (v. 28) and completely.

The person of Christ is everything. She acknowledges Jesus as Lord, the Son of David, and she in faith begs for his mercy. She shouts to the heavens because her daughter is living in torment. And Jesus comes to fill the gap—the gap between Heaven and Hell. He comes to break down the wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles....

What does faith look like? First, faith acknowledges who Jesus is—the Lord, the Messiah, the one who has come to conquer the devil and bring mercy to those who trust in him. First, person; second, persistence. I could have added another *p*—posture, but I’ll include that in her persistence. First she stands before him (v. 22). When that’s not working, she kneels (v. 25). Not a bad way to get through to Jesus in prayer—on your knees. That shows a lot about what you think about the person of Jesus and about how persistent you are.

This is a story of persistence. In verse 22 she comes to Jesus, crying out, “Help!” In verse 23a Jesus is silent (the silence of God doesn’t mean he is uncaring or unconcerned; ask Job). In verse 23b the disciples are indignant and/or annoyed—“Will you get rid of her? Stop all this screaming!” In verse 24 Jesus speaks to her: “I can’t help you. Sorry, it’s just not in the plan. You’re right—I’m the Son of David. I’m the king of the Jews, not the Gentiles. I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” In verse 25 she persists. She fights through the disciples’ annoyance and Jesus’ seeming reluctance. Down she goes on her knees, on all fours, and she looks up at the Master and begs. In verse 26 Jesus says, “Sorry, it’s just not right to give you the food that’s only for them. I can’t take the Jewish messianic feast and give it to Gentiles.” Here Jesus seems firm in his theological position. You can hear the disciples saying, “Amen. Preach it, Lord. What are we doing here with her? Let’s go home.”

But she won’t give up. She’ll wrestle with the angel of the Lord until he blesses her. She’ll knock on that door until the owner gets up and lets her in. “Yes, Lord,” she says, “yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table” (v. 27). What a response! Luz says she’s turned the tables on him. I don’t think she’s done that. But I do think she has slid her way to the table and is at least now under that table. Martin Luther says of her response, “Isn’t this a masterpiece? She traps Christ in his own words. How can Christ get out of this?” Well, he can’t. He doesn’t want to. He never really wanted to. He came to Paganland for pagans. He’ll not feed her crumbs. He’ll push the whole fatted calf onto the floor. “O woman, feast! It’s all yours! Great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.”

What does great faith look like? It looks like this woman’s faith. Faith is in the person of Jesus (Jesus is Lord; Jesus is Christ), and faith is persistent (“Lord, have mercy on me. Lord, do something about this. Lord, have mercy on me, on them, on us”). That’s faith. That’s how one gets into the kingdom and how one stays in the kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

In 15:21–39 we learn who is invited to the table (everyone), and we learn how one gets in through the front door of the house to get to that table (faith). We learn about, if I can say it this way, catholic evangelicalism. The gospel of Jesus Christ is catholic (it's universal—an open invitation to all the peoples of the world) but also evangelical (one enters into and receives the benefits of the gospel only through faith and only through faith in Jesus). Catholic evangelicalism! Here we learn what is so clearly taught in Romans 1:16, 17: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone [it's catholic] who believes [it's also evangelical], to the Jew first and also to the Greek [it's catholic]. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith [catholic/evangelical], as it is written, “The righteous shall live [or walk or persevere or persist] by faith.



## Appendix: Answer Guide

### Lesson 56 (2-16-25)

#### The Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23)

Three Ways of Disaster

Three Grades of Glory

### Lesson 57 (3-2-25)

#### The Wheat and the Weeds (Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43)

The Son of Man Sows

The Field Is the World

The Growth of the Kingdom

The Growth of Evil

### Lesson 58 (3-9-25)

#### Two Parables About Influence (Matthew 13:31-33)

- ... the kingdom of heaven, though now very small and seemingly insignificant, would one day grow into a large body of believers.
- Another lesson of the parable of the mustard seed is that the kingdom of heaven will be a blessing to the rest of the world.
- The first point in this parable is that small things can have great influence, in the way that a small piece of leavened dough can permeate a large piece of unleavened dough to make it rise.
- The second point of the parable is that the influence is positive.
- A third lesson of this parable is that the positive influence of the kingdom comes from within.

### Lesson 59 (3-16-25)

#### Entering the Kingdom (Matthew 13:44-46)

THE KINGDOM MUST BE PERSONALLY APPROPRIATED

THE KINGDOM IS PRICELESS

THE KINGDOM IS NOT SUPERFICIALLY VISIBLE

THE KINGDOM IS THE SOURCE OF TRUE JOY

THE KINGDOM MAY BE ENTERED FROM DIFFERENT CIRCUMSTANCES

THE KINGDOM IS MADE PERSONAL BY A TRANSACTION

### Lesson 60 (3-23-25)

#### Judgment and Proclamation (Matthew 13:47-52)

THE PICTURE (13:47-48)

THE PRINCIPLE (13:49)

THE PERIL (13:50)

## Lesson 61 (3-30-25)

### The Power of Unbelief (Matthew 13:53-58)

UNBELIEF BLURS THE OBVIOUS (13:54)

UNBELIEF BUILDS UP THE IRRELEVANT (13:55–56)

UNBELIEF BLINDS TO THE TRUTH (13:57)

UNBELIEF BLOCKS THE SUPERNATURAL (13:58)

## Lesson 62 (4-6-25)

### The Feeding of the Five Thousand (Matthew 14:13-21)

There are three options when we face severe limitations:

Despair

Frantic Activism

Trust God and Humbly Do Our Work

## Lesson 63 (4-13-25)

### It is I AM (Matthew 14:22-33)

Christology: Jesus Is I Am

Discipleship: Our Response to I Am

## Lesson 64 (4-20-25)

### The Parable of Clean and Unclean (Matthew 15:1-20)

Exalt the Authority of God's Word (MATTHEW 15:1–7)

Promote Authenticity in God's Worship (MATTHEW 15:8–9)

Cultivate Hearts of Holiness (MATTHEW 15:10–20)

## Lesson 65 (4-27-25)

### The Two Resurrections (John 5:25-29)

The Persons

The Power

The Purpose

## Lesson 66 (5-4-25)

### Feeding the “Dogs” (Matthew 15:21-39)

...who is invited to the master's table?— everyone!

...how does one get into this banquet? What's the ticket to the table? Answer: faith in Jesus as Lord.

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